This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

MEMOIRS

OF

CELEBRATED CHARACTERS.

BY

ALPHONSE DE LAMARTINE,

AUTHOR OF "HISTORY OF THE GIRONDISTS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY,

PUBLISHER IN ORDINARY TO HER MAJESTY.

MDCCCLVIII.

This Translation is Copyright.

2106 . e. 3.

Digitized by Google

LONDON:—PRINTED BY RICHARD CLAY,
BREAD STREET HILL.

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
WILLIAM TELL	1
MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ	44
ANTAR	166
BOSSUET	239

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CELEBRATED

EUROPEAN CHARACTERS.

WILLIAM TELL,

THE RESTORER OF THE LIBERTY OF HELVETIA.

(A. D. 1300.)

We are about to relate what the Swiss have handed down as the poetic origin of their freedom; but let us first refer to history and geography, for such information as they afford respecting Switzerland (or Helvetia) and its inhabitants.

The Alps, resembling a strong and prominent knot of the muscles of the earth's granite, constitute a chain of mountains which extends over a space of three hundred leagues, from the mouth of the Rhone towards Marseilles, to the plains of Hungary. The links of this chain become depressed towards each extremity, and gradually lose themselves in the level country. In the centre they rise to an enormous elevation, inaccessible to the steps, and scarcely perceptible to the eyes, of men. Their summits, crenelated as the battlements of

Digitized by Google

a natural fortress, stand out in bold relief from the deep azure of the heavens,—brilliant in dazzling whiteness under the first light of morning, warmly coloured like the rose at midday, and softening down into the hue of the violet as evening declines: these varying tints are produced by the reflection (more or less powerful) of the sun on the sheets of eternal snow, with which the ridges of the mountains are clothed. When we first look upon them from the valleys of Italy or France, at a distance of sixty or eighty leagues, they inspire the same sentiment arising from infinity of height, which is produced by the sea or the firmament as regards immensity of extent. It is a spectacle which paralyzes the beholder, and from fear to terror, from astonishment to admiration, carries the thoughts of mortal man up to the Creator, for whom alone nothing is elevated or boundless; but man feels himself reduced to nonentity under the stupendous architecture of these elevated regions, and utters an involuntary cry: that cry is a confession of his own insignificance, and a hymn to the omnipotent power of the Architect. It is from this cause that the heart is usually more impressed with piety on the sea or on the tops of mountains, than on the level plains. The mirror of His works, in which the Divinity is represented, being on a grander scale, He is there retraced and revealed with more distinct and impressive features.

Towards the southern or Italian side the slopes of the hills are abrupt and steep, as an artificial rampart raised to protect and shelter that fertile country, the

Digitized by Google

garden of Europe. On the north, stretching in the direction of France, Savoy, and Germany, the Alps descend from the clouds to the borders of the lakes and the level of the plains by the most gradual and gentle declivities: these may be described as immense ladders, with steps proportioned to the faculties of man. As soon as you quit the inaccessible region of snow, frost, and eternal ice, formed by the domes of Mont Blanc and the Jungfra, the slopes become gradual; the roots of these gigantic pinnacles seem to swell the soil which covers them; and they become clothed with earth, teeming with vegetation, with greensward, shrubs, flowers, and pasture-land, moistened by the incessant filtration of melting glaciers, which dissolve under the heat of the sun. The eminences diverge widely on all sides as they gradually decrease in altitude; like buttresses, the foundations of which are deeply and extensively sunk, to capacitate them for bearing the incalculable weight they are constructed to carry. Thus they form and hollow out between each separate ridge, narrow beds, which soon become formidable ravines, expanding rapidly into valleys, basins, and extensive plains, at the extremities of which we perceive from the heights the sparkling of transparent lakes, from whence foaming rivers take their course, to seek a distant and a still lower level.

Upon the flanks of these diminishing Alps the traveller encounters here and there a scattered cottage or insulated habitation, resembling a tent constructed of wood, built solely for the summer season, to which the

Digitized by Google

shepherds in following their flocks ascend with the spring, and from whence they depart on the approach of autumn. Below this elevation, villages are found grouped together at the foot of a cascade, and sheltered from the fury of the avalanche by forests of pine. The beams and planks which form the houses of these villages are furnished by the same tree which protects them from the melting snows. These houses, covered by a wooden roof, which overhangs the walls, like the brim of a hat widened to protect the face from the rain, seem as if they were shaped and sculptured by the knife with curious and patient skill; they resemble the toys of white wood which the shepherds carve for their children while they are watching the cattle. External staircases, ornamented by banisters carved in arabesque, lead from the ground-floor to the higher story. Doors, surmounted by hollow niches, containing statues of virgins, heroes, or saints, give admission to the upper apartments, which are lighted by windows in lattice-work, with lozenge-shaped panes of glass set in leaden frames. Long galleries with gothic balustrades surround the entire building, under the open air, like a festooned girdle encircling the waist of a bride. Stems of May trees or sprigs of nutritious plants, suspended from the roof by their roots, hang over the exterior gallery, and form a ceiling of coloured mosaics. Through the windows of the kitchen we perceive the reflection of a large fireplace, which emits a perpetual blaze. Branches and splinters of pine, artistically cleft and piled under the gallery (a certain sign of opulence),

Digitized by Google

constitute a wood-house, well supplied to meet the exigencies of the winter. At the side of this pile are placed folding doors, which open into extensive stables, floored with planks of pine, cleansed and shining, like the table of a careful housekeeper. The lukewarm and perfumed breath of heifers issues from these doors, mingled with the piteous lowing of young bulls, calling for their absent mothers. A moveable wooden bridge, thrown over the entrance to the stables, with a long and gradual descent, conducts the carts loaded with hay to the granary for fodder. Dry forage and yellow straw issue from all the windows of this vegetable magazine; abundance is everywhere mingled with simplicity. In the middle of the court, a hollow trunk of pine drains through an iron pipe, water from the mountain-streams, into an enormous wooden trough, to satisfy the thirst of the cattle.

On whatever side you regard the flanks of the Alpine region, whether on the nearest eminences, the slope of the glacier, the roof of the dwelling-place, the walls of the building, the store of wood, the stable, or the fountain, the eye encounters nothing but pine, alive or dead. The Switzer and the pine-tree are brethren. It seems as if Providence had assigned to every distinct race of human beings a special tree, which accompanies them, or which they follow throughout their terrestrial peregrinations: a tree which affords them nourishment, heat, drink, shelter: which gathers them together under its branches, forms as it were a member of the domestic circle, and becomes in fact a household god,

Digitized by Google

attached to every individual hearthstone. It is thus with the mulberry in China, the date in Africa, the fig in India, the oak in France, the orange in Italy, the vine in Spain and Burgundy, the pine in Switzerland, and the palm in Oceania.* The animal and vegetable world are bound together by invisible ties: annihilate trees, and man must perish.

After having traversed the villages on the declivities of the Alps, the towns present themselves at a distance, either on advanced promontories, or in hollow creeks on the borders of the great lakes. They are easily recognised by their dark walls, pointed roofs, and pewter balls, which faintly reflect a dim sun on the tops of the cathedrals and guildhalls; and also by the multitude of white sails crowded round the outlets or mouths of their small harbours, which hurry on to the blue waters of the lake, like seagulls driven by night to the rocks. These towns, with the exception of Geneva (which resembles a Hanseatic rather than a Helvetian city, and may be considered a sort of universal hotel in this western valley of Cashmere), are of small extent, and contain none of the monuments which mark the luxury of great nations. Municipalities rather than capitals, they present the ruins of an extinct feudality, or the limbs of pastoral communities, to whom the nature of the country and the smallness of the population have denied the power of increase, or the faculty of absorb-

* The fifth division of the habitable globe, comprising the islands of the Pacific, Australasia, the Philippine Islands, etc.—TRANSL.

Digitized by Google

ing other cantons. We are struck only by the majestic, simple, and patriarchal character of the human race. The men there are of a lofty stature, strongly framed, standing erect on their feet, calm in countenance, frank and open in expression, their mouths unwrinkled by deceit, their foreheads wide, high, and smooth, but without those prominences and furrows which the activity of thought raises or impresses on the fronts of races gifted with more cultivated intelligence. The women, light and active in figure, with expanded shoulders, supple arms, elastic limbs, bronzed hair, blue eyes, healthy complexions, oval cheeks, curved lips, and with the tones of their voices at once sonorous and tender, resemble Grecian statues placed upon pedestals of snow, and animated by the fresh, shivering air of the mountains. A mixture of manly dignity with feminine modesty is harmoniously blended in their physiognomy. We perceive at once by their aspect and habitual familiarity, restrained and decent before strangers, that they inhabit a cold and chaste country, where they have no occasion to fear their own hearts: their innocence protects them; their costume enhances their beauty without exposing it to danger. Long tresses of hair, twined with black velvet ribbons, descend on each side of the neck, almost to their heels; a broad hat of felt or straw covers the head; a narrow boddice of wool restrains the waist; the bosom is covered by a chemise, plaited in a thousand folds, and whiter than the snow; a short and ample woollen under-petticoat leaves the leg exposed considerably above the ankle.

Digitized by Google

Whether they are employed in spreading the litter on the floor of the stables, in carrying the pails of maple-wood foaming with the rich freshly-drawn milk of their cows, or in turning up with long wooden rakes the newly-mown hay of the hanging meadows on the borders of the pine-forests to windward of the cascades, —all their different labours resemble festivals. From one hill to another, above the bed of the mountain torrents, they reply to the songs of the young reapers by chanting national airs. These airs resemble modulated cries emitted by a superabundance of life and joy: their last vibrations are prolonged like the echoes of the mountain; musicians note them down without being able to imitate them: they are indigenous only on the waters, or on the green slopes of the Alps. Nature does not here suffer herself to be counterfeited by art. To sing thus, it is necessary to have acquired in infancy, and to have retained with indelible impression on the ear, the rippling of the waves against the sides of the vessel on the lakes, the murmur of the running streams, passing drop by drop through the resounding trough; the mournful sweep of the wind sighing through the dentated leaves of the pine-trees; the lowing of the heifers calling to their young from the hill-tops; the shrill or heavy-toned tinkling of the bells suspended to their necks in the grassy fields; the joyous cries of the infants who sport in the sun upon the haystacks under the eyes of their mothers; the gentle converse of the betrothed who walk hand-in-hand before the elders, whispering to each other of future

Digitized by Google

happiness; the adieu of the young soldier who quits his native mountains for a long absence, venting his grief in sighs as he pursues his march, or his shout of joy on returning from foreign service, when he reaches the last cottage from whence he can once more behold the steeple of his own village. The name given to these songs is *Ranz*. The sons and daughters of the Alps weep and pine whenever they accidentally hear them at a distance from their native country; a thousand apparitions rise up before them with a single inflexion of the voice. Thus their hearts are constructed, and thus is formed the heart of man in every clime and country: a voice brings back a memory, a moment retraces a life, a tear gushes to the eyelids, and in that single tear a whole universe is comprised. In proportion as man retains his natural simplicity, his inward thoughts revert more frequently to the source and origin of his being. It is with the human heart as with a building: the most empty repeats with intense distinctness the echo of a single sound.

The national character of these people has continued ancient in modern days. The Swiss always remains a peasant. He is religious, unaffected, laborious; a shepherd, an agriculturist, a patriot, a soldier, an artizan, and above all, a freeman, he is ever ready to stake life against slavery. The limited size of his country reduces each canton to a single family. He has no ambition to make conquests, but he is ever apprehensive of being conquered. This suspicious jealousy lest one district should seek to assume undue authority over

Digitized by Google

another, scarcely permits him to form an imperfect alliance or confederation with other branches of his own race; an alliance in which the union is wanting that constitutes force. A king would appear to him a tyrant; even a republic with too much federal power, he would consider insupportable. Municipal government is the only authority that he recognises. He wishes to be ruled by habits rather than laws. Traditional customs form his code of legislature. Every village, and almost every family, adopts its own independent system. The republicanism of a Swiss is individual rather than national: from this source springs his liberty, and at the same time his weakness. Were he not protected by nature and the barrenness of his country, he would long since have ceased to exist. Heaven grant that he may continue for ages, a living reminiscence of a primitive people in the heart of the old civilizations of Europe,—a neutral race amongst the stormy combatants who surround the foot of his Alps, and offering by turns a safe asylum to the proscribed victims of the endless revolutions and counter-revolutions of the nations of the West!

His virtues are tarnished by one vice alone—a vice inherent to poverty—covetousness; avarice contracts his hand and his heart. He is ready to sell anything, even his blood, to introduce a little gold into his country, which produces none. Naturally brave and faithful, he traffics with his children, and lets them out for a vile stipend to any prince or nation who engages to pay them. Indifferent as to the cause for which he

Digitized by Google

pledges his life, he becomes the acknowledged mercenary of courts and camps. War, which ought to be an act of devotion, he degrades to a trade; he takes away the life of another, or exposes his own, for hire. Free at home, abroad he lends his arm to sovereigns that they may subjugate their people. No sooner has his period of service expired, than he passes to another, with the indifference of a gladiator of the circus, or of elephants trained to combats, who fight with equal valour for the Persians or the Romans. The elevated valleys of the Alps, overwhelmed by torrents, lakes, and swamps, darkened by thick forests, overrun with bears and fallow beasts, were the last conquests of the Western nations over the barren desert. At the period of the great migrations from the North, which issued in swarms from the plains of Tartary to inundate Europe, and drove before them the settled population, it has been said that fugitive colonies of Cimbri, and particularly Swedes—a race already hardened by the frosts of polar regions,—were drawn to these high valleys by the analogy of situation,—forests, pines, lakes, torrents, and snow,—which reminded them of the country they had left. The lofty stature, light hair, blue eyes, fair complexion, and calm demeanour of the Swiss in the smaller cantons, and even the similitude of names in families and places, attest their remote relationship with the Swedes. These barbarians imported with themselves their northern idolatries. Missionary hermits from Gaul and Italy introduced the light of Christianity; the race, natural, simple, and imaginative,

Digitized by Google

readily acknowledged the influence of miracles; their sober habits, chastity, and natural piety,—their lives, in continual struggle with the elements, the visible power of the Deity,—all predisposed them to believe and adopt the virtues of the new doctrine; the Gospel easily obtained dominion over their faith and feelings. These green Thebaids, like the Thebaids of Egypt, soon became filled with chapels, hermitages, and monasteries, objects of veneration to a people more governed by their belief than their laws. Speedily the Franks and Germans, whose descendants are equally found in Switzerland, inundated the valleys with hordes from Gaul and Germany. The chiefs of these different tribes built strong fortresses, reduced the earlier inhabitants to subjection, and founded petty independent sovereignties, constantly at variance with each other. The states, duchies, counties, baronies, and fiefs, were bounded by a glacier, a lake, a precipice, or a mountain,—a feudal system generated by the patriarchal government, which ruled the several races while they were yet wandering and unsettled. The hereditary lord was no more than an elder, whose tent had been transformed into a fortified castle.

Charlemagne, whose hand extended over the entire West, incorporated all these seigniories and townships of Switzerland with his single empire: the master of Germany became the sovereign of Helvetia. The cities placed themselves under his protection to escape from new invasions of barbarous nations, particularly the Hungarians, who encroached upon their valleys. They

Digitized by Google

constructed ramparts and citadels, and compelled the inhabitants to become at the same time citizens and warriors. Thus they erected themselves into independent communities, rivalling the great lords and abbots, who had hitherto domineered over the people with exclusive supremacy. The German emperor maintained a viceroy in Switzerland under the title of bailiff, who administered justice upon all, and in the name of his master exercised equal tyranny over the towns, the convents, and the castles.

The Counts of Hapsburg, a powerful family of the canton of Aargau, the Counts of Rapperschwyl, rulers of the Lake of Zurich, the Counts of Toggenburg, rivals of both these houses, in their impregnable stronghold of Fischingen, and several other influential chieftains, disputed amongst themselves the dominion of these groups of mountains, lakes, and forests. Their nominal subordination to the empire of Germany was regulated exclusively by their interest; individual caprice was the only law they acknowledged; they were, in fact, the thirty tyrants of Athens become hereditary, and dwelling in so many citadels at the entrances of the valleys. Their manners were as wild and savage as their locality; their traditions teemed with blood,—those of the Counts of Toggenburg in particular bore ample testimony to the arbitrary ferocity of their judgments: the castle of this family, erected on the summit of a rock overhanging the lake, was totally inaccessible to an enemy. One of the lords of this house, Henry of Toggenburg, had married a lady named Ida, whose

Digitized by Google

beauty became the miracle and theme of the entire land. The Count was as jealous as he was affectionately attached to his lovely helpmate. Chance gave an apparent substance to this deadly shadow which embittered his happiness. One day, while the Countess was contemplating from a window in her tower the lake and the valleys which lay expanded before her eyes, in the abstraction of the moment she suffered her wedding-ring, which had slipped accidentally from her finger, to remain on the ledge of the window, and returned without noticing the loss. A crow, flying round the battlements, observed the ring glittering under a ray of the sun. Attracted, as all birds are, by the brilliancy of the gold, the crow alighted on the tower, and thrusting its neck between the bars, carried off the ring to its nest. Discovering afterwards that the gold was of less value than an earth-worm to feed her young, she pushed the ring over the edge of the nest, and allowed it to fall upon the beach. A page belonging to the castle, hunting in that neighbourhood some days after, found the ring, and not knowing to whom to restore it, placed it upon his finger, without dreaming of future mischief. Count Henry, seeing the ring upon the finger of his page, immediately persuaded himself that it was a gift from his wife to her paramour, and the evidence of a criminal intercourse. Without listening to any counsel or argument beyond the impulse of vengeance, he caused the young page to be bound to the tail of an untamed horse, who dragged his dislocated members in mad career across the rocks and

Digitized by Google

precipices; then, taking his innocent wife in his arms, he precipitated her from the top of the battlements into the chasm below; but the gulf rejected the victim. The rocks, covered with thorny shrubs, retained the beautiful Ida suspended by her garments and long tresses over the brink of the abyss. She contrived to escape, under the shadow of night, and demanded sanctuary at the convent of Fischingen. Her innocence, discovered and acknowledged too late, brought her repentant husband to her feet; but although she pardoned the action, she steadily refused ever again to live with him as his wife, and passed the remainder of her days in a cell of the monastery, praying for the guilty Count, and the unfortunate page who had been so cruelly immolated to an unfounded suspicion.

Such were the manners of these barbarous knights who at that time tyrannized over Lower Helvetia. But the elevated and barren site of their habitations had procured the liberty of some families of peasants, situated at the bottom of the Lake of the Four Cantons, at Schwytz, Uri, and Unterwalden. Defended on the north by the stormy waves of the lakes, on the south by inaccessible peaks and glaciers, and on the side of Germany by precipices and forests, these mountaineers acknowledged no supremacy but that of the Emperor. They governed themselves under the form of a republic. Their freedom excited the envy of the inhabitants of the lower valleys, who were subjected to the caprices of a thousand petty tyrants. The city of Zurich, and other neighbouring places, such as Lucerne, united

Digitized by Google

with them from time to time, to throw off the yoke of the nobles and their allies.

Count Rudolph of Hapsburg, who had ascended the Imperial throne by election, remembered that he was by birth a native of Switzerland, and for a time protected his countrymen from oppression. But his son, Albert of Austria, jealous of the remnant of independence which the snows and rocks had left to the inhabitants of Upper Helvetia, undertook to subjugate them, and to reduce even these humble villages to the level of the common slavery. The inhabitants of Schwytz, Uri, and Unterwalden, confederated together in a mutual league to preserve their customs, laws, and liberties. Finding it impossible to seduce them either by diplomacy or pretended kindness, the Emperor despatched lieutenants or proconsuls to reside in the midst of their mountains, sustained by military power, and charged to impress on all, the weight of his anger and the disgrace of his yoke. These governors bore the title of Bailiffs of the Emperor; they exercised in every district the most intolerable and unbounded of all tyrannies—the despotism which is distant and delegated. The land groaned under their capricious violence, but the Sovereign was too far removed to hear the universal lamentation. They pillaged private property, imprisoned the husbands, carried off the wives, and dishonoured the daughters. The crimes which drove the Tarquins from Rome raised the cries of these unhappy victims, but the perpetrators escaped without punishment. Possessed (either through them-

Digitized by Google

selves or by the alliance of the nobles who espoused the Austrian interest) of the ports, the lakes, the passes of the mountains, the valleys and the fortresses which commanded the country, the bailiffs disregarded the murmured indignation of the peasantry, whose hearts alone escaped, while their land and arms were fettered. The most cruel and insolent of these Imperial deputies was the bailiff Gessler, one of those monsters who despise his fellow-men, and who render oppression so intolerable, that the very chains themselves shake and burst under their hands. Every hill re-echoed with his outrages against the honour of the women and the lives of the peasants; his name formed at once the terror, the scandal, and the humiliation of the land. He neither disguised his hatred nor his contempt for the people he had converted into abject slaves. His presence in a village became a certain scourge to the inhabitants. The slightest semblance of prosperity or superiority in any particular family he at once construed into an undue license of liberty.

On one occasion, while traversing the canton of Schwytz with his escort of armed followers, he perceived a new dwelling, constructed with a certain degree of rustic luxury, and belonging to the head of a family, named Werner Stauffacher. "Is it not shameful," cried he to his satellites, "that miserable serfs like these should be permitted to build such houses, when huts would be too good for them?" "Let this be finished," answered his esquire; "we shall then sculpture over the gate the arms of the Emperor,

Digitized by Google

and a little time will show whether the builder has the audacity to dispute possession with us." "Thou art right," rejoined Gessler; and continued his journey, smiling inwardly at the trap laid for the peasant by his insidious counsellor.

But the wife of Stauffacher happened to be standing in the entry while Gessler passed before the house, and overheard the conversation between the bailiff and his attendant. She trembled with apprehension, and dismissed the workmen before the close of the day, lest she should offend the tyrant by continuing to build a house, the sight of which provoked his rage. In the evening, when her husband returned to the village, he inquired of his wife why the workmen were no longer at their labour. "Because a hut is too good for slaves like us," she replied, using the words which Gessler had uttered. Stauffacher sat down in a melancholy mood, and called for his supper. His wife placed before him bread and water. He asked if there was no longer a chamois on the mountains or a fish in the lake. "Bread and water," again answered his wife, "are sufficient for slaves." Stauffacher ate in silence, but deeply felt the truth of the parable. When night fell, he retired to the conjugal bed, where he usually reposed by the side of the wife whom he tenderly loved. She refused any longer to share his couch. "Why," said he, "do you separate yourself from the husband assigned to you by Heaven?" "Because," she replied, "such miserable serfs as we are, ought not to propagate a race more unfortunate than ourselves."

Digitized by Google

She then related to her husband the words she heard pass between Gessler and his attendants. Stauffacher rose indignantly, without speaking took down his sword which was hanging on the wall, descended towards the borders of the Lake of the Four Cantons, threw himself into a fishing-boat, crossed the water, and before the night had expired reached the village of Attinghausen, and stood at the gate of his father-in-law, Walter Fürst.

Walter Fürst, instead of questioning his son-in-law as to the cause of this unexpected visit, placed before him, according to patriarchal custom, the wine and meat which were always held in readiness for guests. Stauffacher pushed back with his hand the offered refreshment. "I have made a vow," said he to his father-in-law, "never again to taste wine or swallow meat until we cease to be slaves." They then sat down together and conversed in a low tone on the outrages of their tyrants, and the indignation of their own hearts. They endeavoured to recall the names of their compatriots who had received the most galling insults from Gessler, and who would be the most readily excited by vengeance to strike for liberty: the case of a young peasant named Melchthal immediately occurred to them. One day this labourer had yoked to his plough two handsome oxen, which formed the riches, strength, and pride of his teams. While tracing a furrow in his field, and admiring the vigorous limbs and glossy hides of his cattle, an officer of the bailiff happened to pass by; he looked on the oxen with

Digitized by Google

envy, declared them too valuable for a serf, and cutting the traces with his two-edged knife, prepared to unfasten the yoke that he might carry them to his master. The young peasant, driven to desperation, tore off a branch from a pine that grew on the border of the field, and, in endeavouring to rescue his oxen, broke the arm of the plunderer. After such an offence, nothing remained for him but instant flight. He took refuge in the neighbouring forests, where he was secretly supplied with food by the compassion of his brother peasants. Here seemed to Fürst and Stauffacher to be an associate supplied to them by persecution; they sought him in his retreat, and confided to him the plot which despair had suggested to them under the shades of a sleepless night. Each of the three belonged to a different canton: the first was of Schwytz, the second of Uri, and the third of Unterwalden. They were well acquainted with the most injured, the most intrepid, and the most implacable of their fellow-countrymen. Each engaged to select ten, and bring them to a chosen rendezvous at the Grütli, to conceal the insurrection and interchange a mutual oath of liberty or death.

The Grütli, a small promontory standing out from the mountains, surrounded on three sides by the waters of the lake, and shaded by thickets of pine, was a spot admirably chosen for the council-chamber of a nocturnal conspiracy. A single sentinel stationed on the point where the peninsula joins the continent, could protect them from all danger of surprise by giving

Digitized by Google

notice of the approach of any of Gessler's spies; and even if they were unluckily surprised, their boats, concealed under the shades of the high banks, could by a few strokes of the oar convey them beyond the reach of all pursuit.

On the night of the 17th of November, 1307, the thirty confederates, descending one by one from their mountains, or singly crossing the lake in small fishing-boats, met, as they had concerted, on the promontory of Grütli. Heaven and earth, the stars, and the silent waves, were the witnesses of that momentous assembly. Never had a holier or more lawful conspiracy been attested by these heavenly evidences in the midst of the Creator's noblest works.

It was Nature conspiring in innocence, and in the presence of Nature: the human heart revealing itself in its most inalienable instincts, and speaking thus by the mouths of a few unsophisticated rustics:—"I also am one of God's works, and in claiming my liberty I vindicate and, at the same time, defend the Creator in His most sublime attribute, the gift of freedom, ravished from His creatures by unholy tyranny." These untutored men wasted no energy in empty harangues; nature inspired them with one common language. Their whole eloquence was comprised in a few brief sentences uttered in a low tone, in two or three significant gestures, and the mutual pressure of honest, hardy hands. They met to interchange oaths, and not to utter exciting speeches. What could they have said equal in value to the fact of that premeditated meeting

Digitized by Google

of so many oppressed spirits, bleeding in their liberty, their self-dignity, and their affections? Words could not weigh in the balance with that decisive night, brooding under cover of its darkness the resurrection of a nation, with those mountains, stars, rocks, and waves, and with the sword ready to be drawn in the most sacred of causes. Demosthenes, Cicero, Catiline, and Mirabeau, would have been overwhelmed in such a hall of legislature. When a feeling is innate, profound, and deeply rooted, words cannot add strength to conviction; silence is the only eloquence of conspiracies which spring neither from politics nor crime, but are engendered by Nature alone. Such was the eloquence of Grütli.

"We swear," exclaimed Walter Fürst, Werner Stauffacher, and Melchthal, extending their arms,—"we swear, in the presence of God, before whom kings and people are equal, to live or die for our fellow-countrymen; to undertake and sustain all in common; neither to suffer injustice nor to commit injury; to respect the rights and property of the Count of Hapsburg; to do no violence to the imperial bailiffs, but to put an end to their tyranny." The day of rising was fixed for the 1st of the January following, 1308. The traditions of Switzerland speak of three springs, which gushed miraculously forth as these words were uttered, at the feet of the three leaders of the confederacy, and which still continue to flow to the present day; but the tradition in this case falls below the event. The true miracle existed in the hearts of the thirty patriots, from whom

Digitized by Google

arose the source of the liberty of Switzerland, and not from the sand which crumbled under their feet.

On the following day, a fresh enormity, perpetrated by one of the feudal chieftains, protected by the bailiffs, spread consternation throughout the three cantons. This noble had been dazzled by the beauty of the wife of one of the serfs on his domain. During the absence of her husband, he entered the house, ordered her instantly to prepare a bath for him, and addressed her with dishonourable propositions. The modest female escaped, and taking refuge in the forest where her husband was pursuing his daily labour, related to him what had occurred. He instantly seized his hatchet, returned to the house, found the tyrant in the bath, cleaved his skull, and fled with his wife to the shelter of the woods. A general cry of indignation burst from the depths of the valleys to the highest peaks of the Alps; from that moment none could expect to possess in safety the dearest of earthly goods, the virtue of their wives. The conspiracy of the thirty heroes of the Grütli was at once augmented by every husband and brother throughout the land. But the entire heart of the nation did not yet overflow; a crowning outrage threw into the measure the fathers, mothers, and their children; it seemed as if the tyranny of the bailiffs had resolved to accumulate in one hostile mass every resentment of which human nature was capable. And now for the first time William Tell appeared upon the scene, to act a prominent part in the liberation of is country.

Digitized by Google

The half-stifled murmurs which arose throughout the hamlets and cottages against the severity of the bailiff Gessler, far from softening his oppression, tended only to irritate and excite him; he determined to put down by force the first symptoms of disaffection which showed themselves in the countenances of the peasants, defied their patience, and invented a crime that he might have victims to punish. In the public square of Altdorf he ordered a pole to be erected, on the top of which he placed his hat, surmounted by the Austrian crown. Every citizen or peasant who passed by was ordered to uncover his head, and bow submissively before this symbol of the Imperial sovereignty; guards posted round the foot of the pole were ordered to make prisoners of all who proclaimed themselves rebels by refusing this act of servile homage to the cap of the Governor.

The obedient mass submitted to this caprice of tyranny either through contempt or terror. One alone refused compliance: this bold exception was a simple peasant of Uri, a fisher of the lake, and a hunter of the chamois; his name was William Tell. He was supposed to take so little interest in the politics which agitated the country, that he had not been included in the thirty chosen spirits summoned to the rendezvous of the Grütli; his heart and conscience were his only incentives to conspiracy. The act of uncovering and bending before a material object, which seemed to transpose the divinity of the Supreme into a frail mortal, appeared to him a mark of adoration forbidden

Digitized by Google

to Christian men, who are taught to worship God alone. On his refusal the Governor's guards seized, disarmed, and bound him with cords to the pole on which the hat was placed. As soon as Gessler was informed of this, he rejoiced to have found a criminal, in whose person he might strike the entire race of mountaineers; accordingly, he hastened to Altdorf, attended by a numerous escort. But here the history of Switzerland, embarrassed by vague and contradictory traditions, resigns the recital to poetry, as being alone capable of immortalizing the grand original scenes which give birth to the liberty of nations. The great poet of Germany and Switzerland,* following the reminiscences of the Alps, relates in the following manner, the simple but terrible interview between William Tell and the tyrant of his country.

The scene is in a meadow, before the town of Altdorf, in the centre stands the pole, surmounted by the hat of the Governor; the archers of Gessler are marshalled round in a circle. The inhabitants of Altdorf and the neighbouring villages are scattered here and there in terrified groups; the snowy chain of the Alps of the Bannberg rises in the background, reaching towards the cloudless sky, as if Nature were exclaiming against the tyranny which sought to enchain the free earth. The soldiers converse together in a low tone.

(FRIESSHARDT *and* LEUTHOLD, *two Soldiers mounting guard.*)

FRIESSHARDT. We wait in vain: no one will pass this way to make obeisance to the hat. There are usually people enough

* Schiller.

Digitized by Google

here for a fair, but since this scarecrow has been suspended on the pole, the meadow has become deserted.

LEUTHOLD. We shall see none but miserable caitiffs come here to doff their tattered bonnets. All honest people will rather make a long circuit than bow before the hat.

FRIESSHARDT. They must take this road at midday, in returning from the guildhall. I expected to have made a good capture just now, for no one thought of saluting the hat; the Curate who had been visiting the sick, perceived this, and placed himself with the Holy Sacraments close to the foot of the pole. The sacristan rang the bell, when all fell on their knees, and I with the rest. But it was the Host they saluted, and not the hat.

LEUTHOLD. Listen to me, comrade: I begin to feel that we are in the pillory here. It is a disgrace to a soldier to be placed on sentry over a hat, and every honourable man will hold us in contempt. Bow to an empty hat! Truly a most ridiculous idea!

FRIESSHARDT. Why not to a hat? You often bow to an empty skull! (*Hildegarde, Matilda, and Elizabeth enter with their children, and pass round the pole.*)

LEUTHOLD. You are so zealous in your duty, that you seek to injure these honest people. For my part, let them bow or not, I shall shut my eyes and see nothing.

MATILDA. Children, this is the Governor's hat; pay all due respect to it.

ELIZABETH. I wish he would go away, and leave us his hat as a sole legacy; things would get on none the worse in the country.

FRIESSHARDT. (*Driving them off.*) Begone, wretched troop of women! You are not wanted here. Send your husbands, and we shall soon see whether they are bold enough to treat our countersign with contempt. (*The women go out. Tell enters with his crossbow, holding his son by the hand. They pass before the hat without perceiving it.*)

WALTER. (*Pointing to the Bannberg.*) Father, is it true that the trees on that mountain shed blood whenever they are stricken by the axe?

TELL. Who has told you that, my child?

Digitized by Google

WALTER. The master shepherd. He says there is magic in those trees, and that if any one injures them, his hand will stretch forth from his grave after he is dead.

TELL. Undoubtedly those trees are sacred. Look yonder; do you see those high white mountains, the summits of which seem to be lost in the heavens?

WALTER. Yes, those are the glaciers, which resound like thunder during the night, and from whence the avalanches fall.

TELL. They are, my child; and those avalanches would long since have swallowed up the town of Altdorf, if the forest, which stands above like a faithful guard, had not preserved it.

WALTER. (*Having reflected for a moment.*) Father, are there any countries where there are no mountains?

TELL. If we were to leave our hills, and follow the course of the rivers, we should arrive at a vast open plain, where there are no foaming torrents, and where the streams flow gently and without noise. There, on every side, the corn grows in extensive fields, and the whole land resembles a garden.

WALTER. Why then do we not go and live in that beautiful country, instead of confining ourselves to this narrow steep?

TELL. The country, it is true, is lovely as Heaven itself; but those who dwell there are not permitted to gather the harvest they have sown.

WALTER. Are they not free as you are, in their inheritance?

TELL. Their fields belong to the Bishop or the King.

WALTER. But surely they can hunt in the forests?

TELL. The game and the birds belong to the lord of the soil.

WALTER. At least they are allowed to fish in the rivers?

TELL. The rivers, the sea, even to the salt, are the property of the King.

WALTER. Who and what is this King, of whom they all stand in such dread.

TELL. He is a man like themselves, but he protects and feeds them.

WALTER. Are they not able to protect themselves?

TELL. In that country no neighbour can trust another.

WALTER. Father, I should be very unhappy there. I would rather remain with the avalanches.

Digitized by Google

TELL. You are right, my child. It is better to dwell with the glaciers than with wicked men. (*They are about to pass on.*)

WALTER. Father, do you see that hat placed on a pole?

TELL. What is that to us? Come, follow me. (*As they are going out, Friesshardt stops them with his pike.*)

FRIESSHARDT. Halt! In the name of the Emperor! Go no further.

TELL. (*Seizing the pike.*) What do you want? Why do you detain me?

FRIESSHARDT. You have disobeyed the order. Follow us.

LEUTHOLD. You have not saluted the hat.

TELL. My friend, let me pass.

FRIESSHARDT. Come, come, to prison.

WALTER. My father to prison! Help! help! (*The people enter on all sides.*) This way, brave citizens! Assist us! To the rescue! (*Tell is seized. The Curate, the Sacristan, and three other inhabitants of the town enter.*)

SACRISTAN. What has happened here?

CURATE. Why do you lay hands upon that man?

FRIESSHARDT. He is an enemy to the Emperor, a traitor.

TELL. (*Shaking them off violently.*) I a traitor!

CURATE. You are deceived, my friend. It is Tell, an honest man and a true citizen.

WALTER. (*Perceiving Walter Fürst, and running to him.*) Help, grandsire! My father is seized.

FRIESSHARDT. On to the prison. March!

WALTER FÜRST. (*Stepping forward.*) Stay; I will be his security. In the name of Heaven, what has occurred? (*Melchthal and Stauffacher enter.*)

FRIESSHARDT. He contemns the supreme authority of the Governor, and refuses to acknowledge it.

STAUFFACHER. Is it possible that Tell can have acted thus?

MELCHTHAL. Thou liest, rascal! (*To Friesshardt.*)

LEUTHOLD. He has neglected to salute the hat.

WALTER FÜRST. And for this he is to be dragged to prison! My friends, accept my security, and set him free.

FRIESSHARDT. Keep your security for yourself; we do but our duty. Bring along the prisoner.

MELCHTHAL. This is an outrageous act of violence. Shall we suffer him to be carried off under our eyes?

Digitized by Google

SACRISTAN. Friends, we are the strongest party. Do not let us submit to this. We ought to stand by each other.

FRIESSHARDT. Who amongst you dares to resist the orders of the Governor?

THREE PEASANTS. (*Advancing together.*) (*To Tell.*) We will rescue you. Why pause? Cast them to the earth at once! (*Hildegarde, Elizabeth, and Matilda re-enter.*)

TELL. I will rescue myself. Go, my brave friends; do you think if I wished to employ force I should fear their halberds?

MELCHTHAL. (*To Friesshardt.*) Dost thou dare to carry him to prison in the midst of his fellow-citizens?

WALTER FÜRST *and* STAUFFACHER. (*To Melchthal.*) Be calm and patient.

FRIESSHARDT. (*With a loud cry.*) Revolt! Rebellion! (*Hunting-horns are heard without.*)

THE WOMEN. Here comes the Governor.

FRIESSHARDT. (*In a still louder tone.*) Treason! Sedition!

STAUFFACHER. Shout, scoundrel, until you burst!

THE CURATE *and* MELCHTHAL. Wilt thou be silent?

FRIESSHARDT. Help! succour! Protect the agents of the law!

WALTER FÜRST. It is the Governor himself! Unhappy event! What will occur next? (*Gessler enters on horseback, with his falcon on his wrist, attended by Rudolph de Harras, Bertha, Rudenz, and a troop of armed followers, who form an extensive circle round the stage.*)

RUDOLPH. Room for the Governor!

GESSLER. Disperse the crowd! Wherefore is this assembly of people? Who called for help? What does all this mean? (*A general silence.*) I demand to know the cause of this! (*To Friesshardt.*) Stand forward! Who art thou, and why dost thou hold that man a prisoner? (*Gessler gives his falcon to one of the attendants.*)

FRIESSHARDT. Most mighty Lord, I am one of your soldiers placed here as a sentinel over that hat. I seized this man in the act of disobedience, for refusing to salute it. I was about to carry him to prison, in compliance with your orders, and the populace were preparing to rescue him by force.

GESSLER. (*After a moment of silence.*) Tell, dost thou then

Digitized by Google

despise the Emperor and myself, who am his deputy, by refusing to pay honour to the hat which I have caused to be suspended there, to test thy obedience? Therein I perceive thy disloyal spirit.

TELL. Noble Lord, forgive me. I erred through inadvertence, and not by intention or contempt for your decrees. As truly as my name is William Tell, I committed the mistake from want of reflection.

GESSLER. (*After another pause.*) Tell, thou bearest the reputation of a most accomplished archer. They say that thou never knowest what it is to miss thy mark.

WALTER. It is true, my Lord. My father can hit an apple at the distance of one hundred paces.

GESSLER. Tell, is yonder boy thy child?

TELL. He is, my Lord.

GESSLER. Hast thou many children?

TELL. My Lord, I have only two sons.

GESSLER. And which of them dost thou love the best?

TELL. My Lord, they are both equally dear to me.

GESSLER. It is well. Since thou canst hit an apple at a hundred paces, thou shalt instantly prove thy skill, here in our presence. Take thy crossbow. Happily thou holdest it in thy hand already. Prepare to strike an apple placed on the head of thy son. But I counsel thee to take good aim, and transfix the mark at the first attempt, for if thou failest thou shalt lose thy head.

TELL. My Lord, what horrible command is this which you lay upon me? What! aim at a mark placed on the head of my dear child? No, no, it is impossible that such a thought could enter your imagination! In the name of the God of mercy, you cannot seriously impose that trial on a father!

GESSLER. Thou shalt aim at an apple placed on the head of thy son. I will, and I command it.

TELL. I! William Tell! aim with my own crossbow at the head of my own offspring! I would rather die a thousand deaths.

GESSLER. Thou shalt shoot, or assuredly thou diest with thy son!

TELL. Become the murderer of my child! My Lord, you have no son,—You cannot have the feelings of a father's heart!

Digitized by Google

GESSLER. Tell, thou art become suddenly very prudent. They say thou art a dreamer, a worshipper of solitude, a lover of the wonderful. For these reasons I have chosen for thee a hazardous enterprise. Another man, less firm, would hesitate, but thou wilt at once and resolutely undertake the trial.

BERTHA. My Lord, do not, I pray you, banter with these wretched people. You see them pale and trembling in your presence. They are not accustomed to take your words for jests.

GESSLER. Who told you that I was in a jesting mood at present? (*He approaches one of the trees and plucks an apple.*) Here is the apple. Make room. Let him measure his distance according to rule. I allow him eighty paces, neither more nor less. He boasts that he would not miss a man at one hundred; let him shoot now, and take heed that he hits the mark.

RUDOLPH. By Heaven! this becomes serious. Boy, throw yourself on your knees before the Governor, and implore his mercy.

WALTER FÜRST. (*To Melchthal, who can scarcely contain himself.*) Restrain your impatience. I implore you to be calm.

BERTHA. (*To Gessler.*) My Lord, there has been enough of this. It is inhuman to trifle thus with the agony of a father. Even if the unhappy man had merited death for this slight fault, has he not already suffered ten executions? Permit him to return to his hut; he has learned to know you, and he and his children will never forget this hour.

GESSLER. Give way, I say. Make room! Why dost thou hesitate? (*To Tell.*) Thou hast deserved death, and I could compel thee to undergo the punishment; but in my clemency I place thy fate in thy own skilful hands. He who is the master of his destiny cannot complain that his sentence is a severe one. Thou art proud of thy steady eye and unerring aim; now, hunter, is the moment to prove thy skill. The object is worthy of thee—the prize is worth contending for. To strike the centre of a target is an ordinary achievement; but the true master of his art is he who is always certain, and whose heart, hand, and eye are firm and steady under every trial.

WALTER FÜRST. (*Falling on his knees before Gessler.*) My Lord, you know your power; but let mercy supersede justice,

Digitized by Google

Take half my possessions; nay, take all, but spare a father this horrible experiment.

WALTER TELL. Grandfather, do not kneel to that wicked man. Tell me where I am to stand. I have no fear for myself; my father can shoot a bird upon the wing: he will never hit the heart of his own child.

STAUFFACHER. My Lord, does not the fearless innocence of the boy soften you?

CURATE. Reflect, my Lord, that there is a Power above to whom you must render an account of your actions.

GESSLER. (*Pointing to the boy.*) Let him be tied to yonder lime-tree.

WALTER. Tied? No, I will not be tied! I will stand quiet as a lamb; I will not even draw a single breath; but if you confine me, I will not bear it: I will struggle in my bonds.

RUDOLPH. We are only going to bind your eyes, my brave child.

WALTER. Wherefore? Do you think I fear an arrow launched by the hand of my own dear father? I will wait for it steadily, and without flinching. Now, father, show them that you are a true huntsman; they do not believe it, and think we are lost: in defiance of that cruel man, aim at the apple, and assuredly you will hit it. (*He places himself under the lime-tree: the apple is put on his head.*)

MELCHTHAL. (*To his companions.*) What! shall we suffer this crime to be committed under our very eyes? Why have we bound ourselves by an oath?

STAUFFACHER. It would be hopeless to interfere. We are without arms, and you see the forest of lances by which we are surrounded.

MELCHTHAL. Alas! if we had struck at once; but Heaven pardon those who advised delay!

GESSLER. (*To Tell.*) To your work! Arms are not borne without using them. It is dangerous to walk about with an instrument of death, and the arrow recoils upon him who launches it. This right of bearing weapons assumed by the peasants is an offence to the lord of the country: arms belong to the Governor alone. If thus you choose to carry a bow and arrows, be it so: I will select the object of your aim.

Digitized by Google

TELL. (*Bending his crossbow and fixing the arrow.*) Stand aside, and give me room!

STAUFFACHER. How, Tell! You will really make the attempt! You shudder; your hand trembles; your knees bend under you.

TELL. (*Dropping his bow.*) My sight wavers! a cloud obscures the objects before me!

THE WOMEN. May Heaven assist him!

TELL. (*To the Governor.*) Spare me this trial! Behold my uncovered heart! command your soldiers to kill me.

GESSLER. I do not desire thy life: I only command thee to shoot. Thou canst accomplish everything, Tell: no danger nor difficulty daunts thee. Thou art as skilful with the oar as with the bow. In the fiercest storm thou canst rescue whom thou wilt. Now, thou preserver of others, save thyself. (*Tell appears violently agitated: his hands tremble: alternately he raises his eyes to heaven, and turns them on the Governor. Suddenly he takes a second arrow from the quiver, and conceals it underneath his vest. Gessler narrowly watches all his movements.*)

WALTER. (*Standing under the lime-tree.*) Aim, dear father: I am not afraid.

TELL. It must be done. (*Recovers himself, and prepares to shoot.*)

RUDENZ. (*Having during this time endeavoured to restrain himself, now advances.*) My Lord Governor, you surely will not carry this to extremity! It can only have been an experiment. Your object is achieved. Rigour, carried too far, departs from prudence, and the bow will break under too much straining.

GESSLER. Be silent until you are consulted.

RUDENZ. No, I will speak: it is my duty to do so. The honour of the Emperor I hold most sacred. Such conduct will inspire universal detestation, and such, I dare affirm, is not the pleasure of our master. My fellow-citizens deserve not to be treated with this cruelty, which exceeds your power.

GESSLER. How! Dost thou dare—

RUDENZ. I have hitherto preserved silence under the evil deeds of which I have been a witness; I have closed my eyes to what was passing round me; I have restrained the indignation I felt within my own bosom; but to continue longer

Digitized by Google

without speaking would be to betray at the same time my country and my honour.

BERTHOLD. (*Interposing.*) Merciful Heaven! you will but irritate him the more.

RUDENZ. I have abandoned my fellow-countrymen; I have renounced my family: I have broken all the ties of nature to attach myself to you. I thought I acted for the best in endeavouring to strengthen the Emperor's government. The bandage has fallen from my eyes: I see that I have been dragged into a fatal abyss; you have bewildered my erroneous thoughts and deceived my confiding heart. With the best and noblest intentions, I have assisted to destroy my country.

GESSLER. Rash madman! darest thou to use this language to thy liege lord?

RUDENZ. The Emperor is my liege lord, not thou. I am born free as thou art, and thy equal in everything. If thou wert not here as the representative of the Emperor, whom I honour even while his power is thus abused, I would throw down my gauntlet before thee, and according to the law of knighthood, thou shouldst give me satisfaction. Ay, make signals to your guards: I am not unarmed like the wretched peasants. I hold a sword, and he who first approaches me—

STAUFFACHER. (*With a loud shout.*) The apple has fallen! (*While all were engaged in listening to the Governor and Rudenz, Tell has shot the arrow.*)

CURATE. The boy lives!

SEVERAL PEASANTS. The apple has fallen! (*Walter Fürst reels, and is near fainting. Berthold supports him.*)

GESSLER. (*Astonished.*) He has shot then! Can it be possible?

BERTHA. The child is unhurt. Recover yourself, good father.

WALTER. (*Running on with the apple in his hand.*) Father! Here is the apple. I well knew you would never harm your own child. (*Tell, as soon as he has launched the arrow, has remained with his head and body stretched forward, as if following its flight. The bow falls from his grasp. When he sees his son approach, he rushes towards him with open arms, and presses him to his heart; his strength then fails him, and he is on the point of fainting. All gaze on him with the deepest emotion.*)

Digitized by Google

BERTHA. Heaven has interposed to save them.

WALTER FÜRST. My children!—My beloved children!

STAUFFACHER. May Heaven be praised for this!

LEUTHOLD. Such a shot was never made before! It will be recorded to the most remote ages.

RUDOLPH. While these mountains stand upon their base, the name of the archer, Tell, will resound amongst them.

GESSLER. By Heaven! he has clove the apple exactly in the centre. Let us do him justice; it is indeed a masterpiece of skill.

CURATE. The skill is wonderful! But woe to him who forced him thus to tempt Providence!

STAUFFACHER. Tell, recover yourself, and rise. You have done bravely, and can now return home in freedom.

CURATE. Go, my friend, and restore your son to his mother. (*They are leading Tell away.*)

GESSLER. Stay, Tell, and listen to me.

TELL. (*Returning.*) What do you require, my Lord?

GESSLER. Thou hast concealed a second arrow in thy bosom. What didst thou intend to do with it?

TELL. (*Embarrassed.*) My Lord, such is the custom of all hunters.

GESSLER. The answer does not satisfy me: something more was in thy thoughts. Speak truly and frankly; say what thou wilt, I promise thee thy life. To what purpose didst thou destine the second arrow?

TELL. Well then, my Lord, since you assure my life, I will speak the truth without reserve. (*He draws the arrow from his bosom, and fixes on the Governor a terrible glance.*) If I had struck my beloved child, with the second arrow I would have transpierced thy heart. Assuredly that time I should not have missed my mark.

GESSLER. Villain! I have promised thee life upon my knightly word; I will keep my pledge. But since I know thee now, and thy rebellious heart, I will remove thee to a place where thou shalt never more behold the light of sun or moon. Thus only I shall be sheltered from thy arrows. Seize and bind him! (*Tell is seized and bound.*)

STAUFFACHER. How, my Lord! Can you treat with this injustice a man whom Heaven so visibly protects?

Digitized by Google

GESSLER. We shall now see if Heaven will deliver him a second time. Carry him to a boat. I will myself at once conduct him to Küssnacht.

CURATE. You dare not commit this outrage: the Emperor himself dares not: it is contrary to our letters of franchise!

GESSLER. Where are they? Has the Emperor confirmed them? He has not, and you will only secure them by implicit obedience. You rise up against the justice of the Emperor, and are nourishing audacious projects of rebellion. To-day I seize this man in the midst of you, but you are all equally guilty. Let those who are wise, keep silence and submit. (*He goes out. Bertha, Rudenz, Rudolph, and some of the soldiers accompany him, Priesshardt and Leuthold remain.*)

WALTER FÜRST. (*Overpowered by grief.*) He is gone, determined to work my ruin, and that of all my family.

STAUFFACHER. (*To Tell.*) Why did you excite anew the fury of that madman?

TELL. Can a man command himself under such agony?

STAUFFACHER. Alas! our cause is ruined! With you we are all enchained and enslayed. With you our last hope is extinguished. (*All the peasants surround William Tell.*)

LEUTHOLD. (*Approaching Tell.*) Tell, I pity thee, but I must obey my orders.

TELL. Farewell, my friends.

WALTER. (*Clinging to his father in despair.*) My father! my dear, dear father!

TELL. (*Raising his arms to Heaven.*) Boy, thy father is yonder: appeal to him!

STAUFFACHER. Tell, shall I bear no message from thee to thy wife?

TELL. (*Tenderly embracing his son.*) The boy is safe and sound. For me, Heaven will lend me aid. (*He goes out, attended by guards.*)

Let us now leave poetry and return to tradition, the second poetry of truth. Gessler, master of William Tell, but apprehensive that the example of this hero of the peasants of Uri might lead to an insurrection,

Digitized by Google

tending to deprive him of his prisoner, determined to convey him that same night to a fortress belonging to the Emperor, situated at Küssnacht, on the summit of Mount Righi. To reach Küssnacht it was necessary to traverse the lake. Gessler, not choosing to confide to any one else the custody of a rebel reserved for exemplary punishment, embarked at Fluelen, a small fishing harbour on the western shore of the Lake of the Four Cantons. A few rowers, a small body of guards, and an inexperienced pilot, formed the entire crew. William Tell, heavily ironed, was thrown under their feet, as an ignominious burden, at the bottom of the boat. They hoisted sail, and half the passage was accomplished without accident or difficulty; when suddenly the stars disappeared, the waves began to rise, the wind thundered with the noise and fury of an avalanche, and a fearful storm burst forth from St. Gothard, near the mouth of the Reuss. The boat was on the point of being overturned by the violence of this sudden tempest; the rowers endeavoured in vain to reach a creek at the foot of the Righi, where they hoped to find shelter; the raging billows dashed them back into the middle of the lake; they were tossed to and fro, unable to find a certain course, at the mercy of the hurricane, which hurried them from bank to bank, throughout an apparently endless night. "There is but one man in all Switzerland," cried they, "who can save us from certain death!" "Who is he?" demanded Gessler. "William Tell!" was the unanimous answer of the peasants of Uri. "Cut the cords that bind him,"

Digitized by Google

exclaimed the Governor; "his life shall be security for ours! Resign the helm to his direction." The cords were cut on the instant, and the skilful pilot rushed to his post. Tell, with the rudder in his grasp, struggled like a conqueror with the tempest. He approached the shore near Altdorf, where the foaming waters of the lake, dashing amidst sunken rocks, resounded ominously through the darkness of the night. At that spot he sought entrance to a small cove known to himself alone, where the hills, gradually shelving to the beach, rendered it practicable to moor a light skiff in calm weather: the noise of the waves beating furiously against the sides of the rocks directed his course. Suddenly he tacked round towards a mountain of foam, which, as it fell and evaporated, disclosed a reef, over which there was sufficient water for the boat to pass in safety: at one bound he gained the land, and with his foot pushed back the frail vessel into the deep. The waves once more obtained the mastery, and sported with it at their pleasure. With the first dawn of light, before Gessler and his companions could recognize the coast of Altdorf and the little harbour of Fluelen, Tell, having saved himself from death, ascended the mountains, reached his own dwelling-place, embraced his wife and child, and armed himself with his crossbow and a single arrow.

The Governor, who also disembarked when day broke, despatched a messenger to Altdorf for his equerries, horses, and guards. The escort speedily joined him. He advanced through a deep pass, following on the track of Tell, and proclaiming loudly that if the escaped

Digitized by Google

fugitive did not voluntarily surrender himself, every day that passed by should cost him the life of his wife or that of one of his children. A man concealed amongst the trees of the forest listened to these savage menaces: an arrow whistled through the branches, and pierced the heart of Gessler; he fell from his horse without being able to finish the oath that quivered on his lips: when his attendants raised him he was dead. None discovered the invisible archer, who struck like divine wrath, and was seen only in the blow. Whether it was that Tell, having performed the act to save his wife and children, over whose heads death was suspended, felt that the secret vengeance resembled more that of an assassin than a warrior; whether he sought no glory from a deed which bore the outward feature of a crime; or whether, in truth, the arrow was launched by some other hand,—it is certain that he never claimed the death of Gessler for himself; he left the ambiguous transaction involved in mystery, and, satisfied with having preserved his family, resigned to others the honour of reconquering the political liberty of his country; he joined in no revolt beyond that to which he had been impelled by nature. This holy and most legitimate exciting cause has made him, in spite of himself, the hero of Switzerland. A wife, Lucretia, liberated Rome; a father, William Tell, disenthralled Helvetia.

This last attempt of Gessler upon the tenderest feelings of human nature,—this drama of the apple, this moral punishment of a father, this execrable murder of a child by the hand of him who gave him life,—if that

Digitized by Google

hand had trembled for a moment; the agonizing cries of horror which burst from every mother in the land; the immolation of the tyrant, saved first by his victim, and then struck down by an invisible hand while hurrying on to the commission of fresh crimes,—all these causes combined, hastened the execution of the plot formed by the confederates of Grütli for the liberation of their mountains. Each peasant discovered an associate in his neighbour; they understood each other without conversation, and pledged mutual faith with no oath beyond a glance, the expression of the eye, and the pressure of the hands: the soul of William Tell at the moment when he elevated his bow, hesitating between the apple placed on the head of his child and the heart of Gessler, transfused itself into all Switzerland.

On the 31st of December, the three chiefs of the league of Grütli raised their banners, and called their countrymen to arms. The standard of Uri represented a bull's head with the broken links of the yoke hanging round the neck; that of Schwytz was a cross, the double symbol of suffering and deliverance; the banner adopted by Unterwalden consisted of two keys, symbolical of the keys of the Apostle St. Peter, and destined to open the iron gates of their long slavery.

At midnight, Stauffacher, followed by the chosen youth of Uri, climbed in silence the steep ascent of the castle of Rosberg, one of the strongest fortresses of the Austrians, when all slept, save only love and patriotism. A young girl of the race of serfs, who filled through constraint a servile situation in the castle, happened to

Digitized by Google

be betrothed to one of the conspirators: apprised by him of the day and hour when the attempt would be made, she flung to him to the bottom of the precipice a knotted cord fastened to the bars of the window. Thus gaining entrance into the interior with twenty of his companions, he surprised the German Governor in bed, disarmed and confined him in the dungeon of the castle. The victors allowed the Austrian flag to continue waving over the ramparts, as a snare. On the following day a band of nobles, flying from the insurrection in the open country, entered, and found themselves hostages in the hands of foes.

At Sarnem, the peasants, concealing their arms under their vestments, came in as usual, loaded with lambs, kids, chamois, and fowls, as if to present to the lord of the district the customary offerings on New Year's day: the nobleman, who was proceeding on his way to the church, saluted them as he passed, and ordered them to wait his return. No sooner had he cleared the portcullis, than they lowered it, drew forth their hidden weapons, made prisoners of the garrison, and, sounding from the top of the keep the horn of the mountain shepherds, called the whole country to liberty. During these surprises and assaults by the companions of Stauffacher, Walter Fürst and William Tell escaladed the castle of Uri, hitherto reputed to be impregnable; Melchthal and his associate heroes at the same time obtained possession of all the other citadels. When evening arrived, bonfires, lit by the conquerors on the ramparts they had won, reflected from mountain-top to

Digitized by Google

valley, and from wave to wave, the first glimmering of Helvetian independence, which eight successive ages have failed to extinguish. This date is incorporated with the name of Tell, who, if not the actual agent, was at least the originator of his country's freedom. Happy are they who are thus identified with their country! posterity seeks not to inquire minutely into their title to fame, but associates them with the greatness, the virtue, the durability of their race, and invokes blessings on them, down to their latest descendants. It is thus in the case of the unpretending peasant, William Tell: the simple honesty of his character bears a striking analogy to the primitive and pastoral people who commemorate for ever his name and actions in their national traditions. His image, with those of his wife and children, are inseparably connected with the majestic, rural, and smiling landscapes of Helvetia, the modern Arcadia of Europe. As often as the traveller visits these peculiar regions; as often as the unconquered summits of Mont Blanc, St. Gothard, and the Righi, present themselves to his eyes in the vast firmament as the ever-enduring symbols of liberty; whenever the Lake of the Four Cantons presents a vessel wavering on the blue surface of its waters; whenever the cascade bursts in thunder from the heights of the Splügen, and shivers itself upon the rocks, like tyranny against free hearts; whenever the ruins of an Austrian fortress darken with the remains of frowning walls the round eminences of Uri or Glaris; and whenever a calm sunbeam gilds on the declivity of a village the green velvet of the meadows where the

Digitized by Google

herds are feeding to the tinkling of bells and the echo of the *Ranz des Vaches*,—so often the imagination traces in all these varied scenes the hat on the summit of the pole,—the archer condemned to aim at the apple placed on the head of his own child,—the mark hurled to the ground, transfixed by the unerring arrow,—the father chained to the bottom of the boat, subduing night, the storm, and his own indignation, to save his executioner,—and finally, the outraged husband, threatened with the loss of all he holds most dear, yielding to the impulse of nature, and in his turn striking the murderer with a death-blow. The artlessness of this history resembles a poem: it is a pastoral song in which a single drop of blood is mingled with the dew upon a leaf or a tuft of grass. Providence seems thus to delight in providing for every free community, as the founder of their independence, a fabulous or actual hero, conformable to the local situation, manners, and character of each particular race. To a rustic, pastoral people like the Swiss, is given for their liberator a noble peasant; to a proud, aspiring race such as the Americans, an honest soldier. Two distinct symbols, standing erect by the cradles of the two modern liberties of the world, to personify their opposite natures: on the one hand *Tell*, with his arrow and the apple; on the other, *Washington*, with his sword and the law.

Digitized by Google

MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ.

(SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.)

GLORY has its chances, or rather its mysteries; for there is a plan and purpose in all things. We inappropriately denominate a mystery, that secret logic which directs earthly events, and which our want of reflection has been unable to penetrate; and thus, instead of attributing effects to their true causes, we consider them as the caprices of chance.

Let us first explain what is the peculiar chance that presents itself to our minds at the mention of the name of Madame de Sévigné. We shall afterwards seek to discover whether the reputation attached to this name is in truth a matter of accident; and we shall then endeavour to interpret the mystery through which mere idle gossip has gained immortality, and ranks amongst the most valuable records of one of the most memorable of ages.

An obscure female, a poor widow, the mother of two young children, possessed of no personal consequence in

Digitized by Google

her own land and no rank at court; without a name likely to attract the attention of her country, without the prestige of any dignity that she might have inherited from father or husband, owning no large fortune, and no distinguished relatives amongst those who were active in the political affairs of her time; without the favour, and even unknown to the reigning monarch; sometimes dwelling concealed in a street of one of the obscure quarters of Paris, at others in the retirement of a farm-house in Burgundy or Lower Brittany,—this indigent widow sat during the summer evenings beneath the shadow of her tree at "Les Rochers," and in winter returned to her fireside at Paris, where she listened to the voice of her own heart, and gazed from her window upon the world passing without. She seized the pen: her writing flowed without pre-arrangement, guided only by the impulse of the moment: she poured forth her soul to her daughter, she talked familiarly with her friends, she whispered messages to the absent, she discoursed with herself or with Heaven; day after day she cast notes and letters into the post, thinking little of the public, of the art of writing, of posterity or of fame; and found all at once that she had created a literary monument, not only the most original, varied, and national of her own age, but also a record of the deepest and most pathetic emotions of the human heart in every century. The march of time has advanced; the inquiring have drawn forth these letters from their concealment; their conversations are transfigured into genius, their gossip has become history, and their softest

Digitized by Google

whisperings have reverberated in permanent echoes to all posterity. Such is the chance! And now let us examine the mystery.

What is this mystery? Its explanation lies in a few words. It is that the interest created by human occurrences is not found in the greatness of situations or events, but in the emotions of the mind by which they are re-echoed, and which is to them, be they great or small, what air is to sound—the medium of resonance. You may strike powerful blows upon the most sonorous metal, but if air be wanting, or even too rarefied, silence alone will be your answer, the echo is mute: without air there cannot be sound, without sensibility there can be no impression; thus there is also no interest and no glory: it is the secret of the human heart, that it can only be moved by coincidence with something that has been moved before.

There are many minds concealed from the world far in advance of their period, and possessing deeper tones than the age in which Providence has placed them, as it casts echoes into the profound recesses of forests and caves; they are never seen, and only heard when the woodcutter fells the trees, and time crumbles the rocks into dust. These speaking souls, vehicles which convey to us the impressions of their own hearts and of their period, interpose themselves irresistibly by their fine and vibrating nature between us and the world, and compel us to think and feel in them and through them, while we vainly struggle to escape from their influence. They form the sensible element, the sympathetic centre (if

Digitized by Google

we may be permitted to use a material simile), reflected by which we behold all the past, the present, and often our own selves. Thus it is that by the sport of fortune, reputation and literary glory are attained; they reach beings unappreciated by their contemporaries, men dwelling in retirement, women concealed by obscurity. Many anonymous writers, such as the author of the 'Imitation of Jesus Christ,' are in reality greater and more immortal than their entire age; and while other men who deeply fathom humanity, who overturn empires, who control sceptres, who lead great assemblies, and who administer public affairs, endeavour to create a grand and enduring halo round the name they leave behind them, they are surpassed in fame by an individual upon whom they would not have deigned to cast a glance amidst the crowd at their feet,—by a poor dreamer like St. Augustine, by an insignificant monk such as the anonymous writer of the 'Imitation,' or by an obscure female such as Madame de Sévigné. Posterity can with difficulty remember the names of the pretended great politicians, poets, orators, and authors, who monopolized the renown of their age; but after the lapse of centuries it listens with avidity to the most secret palpitations of the hearts of these unlearned beings, as though their emotions comprised the sublimest events in the history of human nature; and this in truth they are, for circumstance is nothing: the human heart is everything in man. Fame herself knows this, therefore she selects her dearest and most immortal favourites not from those who seek to shine with com-

Digitized by Google

manding brilliancy, but amidst such as have poured forth the most pathetic confessions of the soul.

In this, according to our notion, consists the mystery of that increasing reputation which has ever been attached to the name of Madame de Sévigné.

We shall now proceed to examine her life. But no, let us yet pause a moment longer. Before we enter on her history, in order that it may be well understood, a few words are required upon a species of literature which has won for her the notice of the world; which did not exist before her time, which she created, and which we can only characterize by one phrase—*domestic literature*—the genius of the fireside, the heart of the family.

There are two different centres towards which the thoughts, acts, and writings of men in modern society, and even in the society of all ages have tended,—the public at large, and the family circle. By the latter is understood the restricted and limited public contained within the walls of the domestic dwelling, and twined more immediately round the heart by close and intimate ties.

It is not true, as has been pretended in our own days, to authorize the destruction of family ties by an impossible individuality or a barbarous communism, that political society has created the domestic circle: its institutor is Nature herself. Fortunately for the human species, whose safety is placed above the influence of our aberrations and dreams, it is from no earthly institute that family ties are derived, but from the law of God, in the form of an internal instinct. Instincts are the

Digitized by Google

right divine of the human constitution; we do not discuss, we only submit to them. The truly philosophical mind rebels not against instincts, but, on the contrary, buries itself in the contemplation of that infinite wisdom and supreme goodness which has charged Nature herself with the office of instructing us in the first article of our inherent constitution.

Providence, by a law equally mysterious and merciful, has appointed that the human species shall be created and preserved only by love. At the sources of life it has placed a sympathetic desire to give birth to offspring, and a general wish in the heads of families to perpetuate their generation; by a mystery of our creation, which is at the same time a revelation of our destiny, an isolated being can exist, but two are necessary to perpetuate their race: unity is unproductive, but a pair can multiply for ever. From this pair proceeds a third, the offspring and completion of love. The infant is the fruit of affection; union exists before its birth, but not until after that event is there a family. The desire of family, or love of perpetuation, increases with the new existence by which it is created and entertained; born as it were with the first infant in the bosoms of both parents, and springing by an instinctive reciprocity back from the heart of the child towards father and mother, the former loves because it is beloved by them: this completes the group, and forms the trinity of nature from whence flows and reflows the holiest sentiment of humanity—family affection!

Along with the development and multiplication of a

Digitized by Google

race in numerous children and grandchildren, increases and varies in many new forms, and in a thousand unequal or graduated proportions, that love which is imbibed at its first fountain, the maternal bosom, and from whence each bears a portion that it communicates to the common group of which it forms a component. The sympathies existing between the different members of this circle, unceasingly expanding, changing, and binding one individual to another, connecting the one with the many, and the many with the one, form what is denominated relationship—relationship of blood and spirit—which is near or remote in the same proportion as the blood running through the veins of the scions of a family approaches or recedes from its source, and as it preserves in strength or weakness the love which flows through the heart in the same stream, simultaneously with this constantly-supplied sap of the human tree.

Thus there is a love parallel to that of the father for the mother, and that of the mother for the father; this love, descending from the parents to the first-born, returns from the first-born to the parents: the same love extends from brother to brother, from sister to mother, to father, brother, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces; from nephews and nieces to uncles and aunts; from the grandchild to the grandmother; from the grandmother to the grandchildren, down to the latest generation which the briefness or longevity of life permits us to reach with the eye, the heart, or the imagination. This love reflects again, in a fainter degree, upon the descendants of these brothers, sisters, and grandchildren, and

Digitized by Google

still preserves between them a natural attachment and a sympathetic reciprocity; as the sap, the name, and the memory of one common root perpetuates itself in all the diversified branches of a single tree.

Family ties are formed of the innumerable ramifications composing all the direct and indirect affinities between heart and heart, and these become weakened in proportion as they diverge from their three first sources, but still preserve, even to the widest circumference of the increasing circle, a small portion of the temperature which warmed and illumined the first fireside.

The same blood, drawn from the same veins; the same milk, imbibed at the same breast; the same name, borne by each, and of which each is bound to maintain the honour (whether obscure or illustrious signifies nothing), and which cannot be tarnished or exalted in one without reflecting on the rest; the common fortune, which bestows affluent or narrow means, as it is amassed or subdivided amidst the inheritors according to the number of children; the same paternal mansion, whether in town or country, whose roof has sheltered their cradles during infancy, and the shadowy remembrance of which is impressed on the mind to the last moment of existence; the same traditions, that common consent of mind which binds together the religion, customs, manners, and innate sentiments of the hereditary group; finally, the same remembrances of lessons, conversations, labours, localities, friendships, enjoyments, hospitalities, ease, weariness, happiness, tears, births, deaths, hopes, and disappointments,—sad and

Digitized by Google

joyous secrets of the domestic hearth,—all these form, unknown to ourselves, around our hearts an atmosphere of ineffaceable impressions, which pervades equally our moral and physical senses; from the influence of which escape is impossible, and which, though it does not bear the cold sternness of legislation, displays the irresistible force of nature.

It was thus in those primitive ages when every motion of new-born society was regulated by the impulse of nature and by no written edict, and when laws were the inspiration of instinct, that the sovereign was no more than the father, the tribe the family, and the nation a collection of tribes, connected by the common link of fraternity in blood. A patriarch may be dethroned, legitimate paternal authority may be circumscribed, the distinction of tribe may be dissolved and absorbed in the general commonwealth, but the family bond can never be annihilated; it will endure for ever, unbroken as Nature's eternal protest against the engrossing absorption of state government, as it will equally remain by the force of hereditary proprietorship, its divine foundation, a bulwark against the mischievous doctrine of Communism, that impotent assault of Utopian theories against the strongest instincts of man's nature.

We can imagine that a race of beings so distinct, and so closely bound to each other in the midst of a great national group, should have not only their peculiar laws, habits, sentiments, duties, and relations, but also their particular literature. It is of this kind of composition, which we have previously denominated

Digitized by Google

domestic or *familiar literature*, that Madame de Sévigné has given us the most beautiful and perfect specimen.

This literature is essentially of a confidential nature: the house is encircled with a wall as inaccessible as the private life of its inmates. We speak there in a low voice, for we desire only the attention of parents and relations around the fireside, and what is written is exclusively intended for their perusal. Domestic tones never resound through public haunts: those which we utter to the world bear a different accent from those we confide to the bosom of private affection. Poems, histories, philosophical essays, oratorical harangues, romances, and books, are written for the public and posterity; but letters alone are transcribed for the family circle. The family circle, therefore, a type of love and friendship, has but one species of literature—correspondence; and when this correspondence possesses the gift of fascination, so eminently displayed in that of Madame de Sévigné, her relations, after her death, suffer the mysterious leaves to escape one by one; the age acknowledges their value; succeeding generations read them, and the whispered dialogue of a mother and daughter becomes the theme of conversation to all posterity.

Such is the history of Madame de Sévigné. In laying open her letters, the seal has been removed from her heart; but it is not only the seal of her own heart which has been broken by this violation of confidence, but also that of the age in which she lived.

Digitized by Google

This woman, speaking from the solitude of her insignificant habitation at "Les Rochers," has become the echo of a reign. It is this fact which renders the correspondence of Madame de Sévigné, no matter how familiar the style, essentially historical; it is this which renders her book, written by one ever listening at the gates of a court, eminently aristocratic; and the peruser, in order to be pleased with it, must have been born in, or associated with, the highest ranks of the elevated circle to which it makes so many allusions,—allusions which would be incomprehensible save to those who have some knowledge of the language, half-uttered phrases, and mysterious peculiarities of the court. For this reason, therefore, this book, although eminently national, will never become generally popular. If Madame de Sévigné, instead of being a woman of high birth, writing for courtiers, had been a tender mother, subsisting in an ordinary condition of life, and writing for a family of humble rank, her work, more intelligible, accessible, and sympathetic to all classes endowed with feeling, would form not only the delight of the more refined world, but would become the manual of every family, the diapason of the human heart.

We trust the reader will pardon us a childish digression, suggested by these reflections. It was in this identical book that we first learned to read. A mother, educated amidst the elegant refinements of a court, but banished after early youth by mediocrity of fortune into a country retirement similar to the "Rochers"

Digitized by Google

of Madame de Sévigné, found in that authoress, besides many analogies of thought and feeling, all the recollections of the aristocratic world she had frequented,—a fund of contemplation applicable to the rural solitude she inhabited with her children, and to all the pious emotions of her own maternal heart seeking to shelter its nest from the storms of life. This volume, every page of which was so continually studied, always reposed upon the time-worn stone mantelpiece; and when our attention to the lessons which we studied beneath the shade of our garden-trees and repeated at our mother's knee merited approbation, we were rewarded by having read aloud to us a few of the letters most suited to our age and comprehension. The chief favourites were those in which the mother speaks to her daughter of her woods, her avenue, her dog, her nightingales, her religion, her pious meditations upon the sunset beheld from the terrace of Livry, of her kind uncle the Abbé de Coulanges, and of her friends and neighbours, whose visits interrupted her evening reveries and her gardening occupations. We were as intimately acquainted with the footpaths of "Les Rochers" and the parterres of Livry as with those of our own little domain. Thus these places and these impressions fixed themselves indelibly in our imaginations at ten years of age; and we beheld in the mother we heard of but the counterpart of our own, and in the children, little more than a reflection of ourselves. Since that period the book ceased to command my attention: it contained a tenderness of feeling suffi-

Digitized by Google

cient for any age, but not enough of passionate warmth to satisfy the ardour of my youth.

Many years afterwards, while hunting one day in the forests of Upper Burgundy, the chase led me accidentally to the edge of a wooded hill, from whence, appearing through the yellow leaves and transparent haze of autumn, I beheld an extensive valley spread under my feet: the basin was formed by smiling meadows, through which flowed a narrow river, bordered on either side by large willows, while numerous herds of red and white horned cattle were crossing at the ford; the breeze from the surface of the water, as it turned the leaves, gave them a power of reflection as if they had been plates of silver; the murmuring stream, apparently without current, seemed to issue from the vast shadow of an extensive forest, as if produced by the droppings of the mist from its innumerable branches: on the northern side it sparkled with the rays of the setting sun as far as the eye could follow its course between high wooded banks, at one moment seeming to meet and enclose it, and again opening to afford it a passage.

Excepting the grassy basin of the valley, nothing was visible but one unbroken forest, bounded by the horizon; the scene was canopied by a dark and cloudy sky. Its stillness was interrupted from time to time by the soft lowings of a cow, which called back its adventurous offspring from the muddy banks of the river; and by the strokes of the woodcutter's axe, felling large oaks at various distances upon the outskirts of the

Digitized by Google

forest, and heaping the peeled logs into heaps red as blood, from the rays of the declining sun, upon the borders of the stream; smoke ascended from the fire of some charcoal burners in a distant glade, and rose to the clouds in a thick blue column, like the vapour of a fire watered by heavy dew.

It was the season and the hour when the misty exhalations which proceed from the woods hang about the greensward, rising and falling with the slightest motion of the air, separating, gathering, and glistening with the sun's rays, and resembling in their convulsive undulations the huge waves of some tempestuous but voiceless sea.

All at once I beheld emerging from this restless bed of fog, like the hull of a wreck struggling into port, the summit of a black tower, around which hovered a flight of rooks, uttering their hoarse cries: two additional turrets gradually pierced the obscurity, and seemed to rend away and cast to the ground every shred of the misty winding-sheet which enveloped them; next followed the red square roof of the keep; then the long grey façade of a dismantled château, pierced irregularly with windows of unequal height, around the iron gratings of which, the ivy, climbing up from the ditch, had attached itself closely in separate tufts. The parapet surrounding the moat was crumbling into ruin, and in many places had fallen into the stagnant water, which nevertheless served still as a reservoir for oxen and other cattle. The drawbridge, the broken and useless chains of which hung above the door like the arms of

Digitized by Google

a gibbet, was replaced by a stone causeway; the ground-floor was covered with unyoked carts and scattered sheaves of straw, while a peasant-girl in wooden shoes threw corn to some fowls on the steps of an arched gateway, the armorial bearings of which, mutilated by the hammer of popular revolution, resembled the marks left by a bullet upon a rampart-wall. A single chimney sent forth thick volumes of black smoke throughout the vast edifice; the windows, instead of reflecting the rays of the setting sun from glass panes, were stuffed with the hay and straw of the last harvest, which protruded from their empty frames, and threshing-flails resounded through the lofty guard-room. It was evident that the château had been transformed into a farm, and by one of the vicissitudes to which such edifices, too vast for their rightful possessors, were subject during the past century, the farm had once more become the château.

At a short distance from the chief building stood a small house, backed by stables and barns, resembling an English cottage in the parks of Windsor or Richmond. It had all the freshness, cleanliness, and elegance of recent construction. It stood in the centre of a lawn, encircled with painted palings, over which were trained autumn roses and sweet-smelling jasmines. Its plate-glass windows dazzled the eyes with the reflection of the last light of day; the almost imperceptible smoke of dry wood proceeded from several chimney-pots, and seemed to invite the approach of guests. Several grooms in yellow liveries led saddled horses up

Digitized by Google

and down the gravel-path in front of the entrance. The proprietors or their visitors were constantly appearing and disappearing on the threshold: all around proclaimed the life, animation, and wealth of an autumnal residence, occupied by a hospitable family. Everything was unknown to me,—the château, the farm, the cottage, their ancient possessors and their present owners, even the name of the valley into which I had been drawn by the voices of the staghounds on the track of the deer.

While I remained immovably contemplating this unknown spot, and to me nameless ruin, I heard behind me the galloping a horse, and I was joined in a moment more by one of my companions of the chase, Monsieur de Capmas. He had lived for many years in the small town of Semur, the picturesque capital of this district of forest, rock, and torrent. He was a man of middle-age, but still essentially young: his passion for the chase, and his amiable cordiality of manner, had rendered him intimate and welcome in all the family circles of Upper Burgundy. He equally loved poetry, literature, the baying of the hounds in the forest, and a rapid gallop beneath its leafy arches; this reciprocity of tastes formed a bond of sympathy between us, and long after that period he became one of the companions of my tent amidst the deserts of Mesopotamia and the rocks of Palestine. Alas! he no longer lives, save in my affection, but he belongs to the departed of whom we preserve an unfading recollection, and whose memory is accompanied by a smile even in death.

Digitized by Google

"Do you know where we are?" said he to me with the low, earnestly interrogative accent of a man anxious to impart an agreeable surprise. "No," I replied, "but it is one of the most romantic landscapes and the most melancholy ruin I have encountered in our wanderings." "They are so, indeed," he answered; "but the valley and château would gain a deeper interest in your eyes did you know their name, and were I to inform you whom these ruins cradled." "Where then are we?" I asked. "At Bourbilly," was his response, "the château of Madame de Sévigné." At this name, the landscape, till now lifeless and indifferent, became suddenly illuminated, as though its magnetic sound had kindled watch-lights on every turret of the château and on the summit of each hill beneath the melancholy horizon. The lazy waters, extravasated puddles of the Serin in the meadows, seemed to multiply reflections of the infant with the fair hair, who became the idolized child of her own century. I thought I heard her name murmured by the river, the leaves of the trees, the echoes of the old walls, and in the cries of the rooks fluttering round the battlements of the keep. Such was the power of a name, not only living itself, but capable of reanimating the dead scene with which it had once been identified.

Every page of the book so valued by my mother, and so long closed, seemed to re-open, and call forth a thousand emotions from the inexhaustible fountain of memory: but not a line possessed the same value as that which accident had led me to gaze upon,

Digitized by Google

written, and painted in the valley beneath my eyes.

Another accidental occurrence tended to feed my pious regard for a memory associated in my heart with that of my own mother. The proprietor of the château and woods of Bourbilly was acquainted with my companion, and received us with the most cordial hospitality. He gladly seized an opportunity of brushing the dust from that monument which his idolatry for Madame de Sévigné had induced him to purchase, and of guiding us, step by step, to each trace left by a family whose genius had connected them with the whole world—in the halls and corridors, in the escutcheons, the lanes, the avenues, and in the smoke-dried curtains hanging on the castle walls. We passed two days and nights in this shrine of recollection and sentiment. The history of Madame de Sévigné began there as a child of ten years old, and returned to the same spot in advanced age: it formed the cycle of her life. We had only to gaze around us and read what we had read before, to live again with her throughout that long existence.

In that place she was born, or rather there was she nursed and cradled, in the spring of 1626, at which period her mother, who had given birth to her during a visit to Paris, carried her infant daughter back to the family nest; there her eyes first opened to the light; on that soil she essayed her earliest footsteps; beneath those leafy shades she learned to utter the first imperfect accents of childhood; there, during the

Digitized by Google

years in which the intellect expands, she imbibed her earliest impressions of nature; in those fields she played as unconstrainedly as the deer of the forest, and breathed with the elastic and invigorating air of Upper Burgundy, the healthy constitution which bestowed upon her complexion the roses that have been so celebrated; and gave to her soul that intense sensibility which is always the prelude of genius when not the forerunner of passion.

I studied with interest the mysterious analogy between this serene landscape, backed by a sombre horizon, and the woman of variable temperament, whose smile brightened on a concealed foundation of deep sadness. The Persian proverb says, "To know the plant, you must know the spot where it grows." Man up to a certain age resembles a plant, and his soul is rooted in the soil of that locality the atmosphere of which has nourished his mental and physical organization.

The father of Madame de Sévigné, a gentleman of high descent in Charolais, but residing in Upper Burgundy, was the son of Christophe de Rabutin, Baron of Chantal, which fief was situated near Autun, and Lord of Bourbilly, an estate in the neighbourhood of Semur. Christophe de Rabutin had married Mademoiselle de Chantal, daughter of the President of the Parliament of Dijon. Upon the death of her husband, who was killed while hunting, at the age of thirty-six, his widow, seized by an unaccountable veneration for St. François de Sales, a gentleman of Savoy and Bishop

Digitized by Google

of Geneva, abandoned her children, and the house of her father-in-law, in order to follow, in the character of a Magdalen, the doctrines of a Christian perfection, so refined that it commanded the desertion of all the ordinary duties of life. She ceased to be a mother according to nature, in order to become one according to grace, in a monastic female order, known by the denomination of "Sisters of the Visitation." St. François de Sales, whose sense of what was right and wrong would not permit him to require a virtue beyond the power of nature, endeavoured to dissuade his proselyte from a resolution which, though highly edifying, was attended with much difficulty. The Baroness de Chantal was obstinately bent on her project, and she literally passed over the body of her son, who flung himself across the threshold of the door in order to prevent his mother from quitting her home to enter a convent. She attached herself exclusively to the saint; the entered into a spiritual correspondence with him; she founded an order, and was gradually transformed into a saint herself, and under that title she is venerated by her disciples to the present day, who look upon her as their patroness;—but decidedly she cannot be denominated that of either mothers or orphans.

The son who endeavoured to deter Madame de Chantal from quitting the world was the father of Madame de Sévigné; he married Marie de Coulanges, the daughter of a State Councillor distinguished at court for his wit, amongst soldiers for his courage, and

Digitized by Google

by many incidental duels for his ready skill with the sword; he died contending against the English on the battle-field of Rochelle. Gregorio Léti, the historian of that period, states that he fell by the sword of Cromwell himself.* Three horses killed under him, and twenty-seven lance thrusts on his body, attested his heroism.

His widow survived him but a short time, and left their only child an orphan at six years of age. Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, who was destined at a future date to become the prodigy of mothers, was thus in her own person deprived of maternal tenderness: she created the passion in her own heart, and imbibed it from no example. Her grandmother, the Baroness de Chantal, completely absorbed in a project of building eighty convents, surrendered the guardianship of the orphan girl to her mother's family. They selected her uncle, the old Abbé de Coulanges, and possessor of the priory of Livry, in the vicinity of Paris, for her tutor. This relative became a father to the orphan, and it is difficult to comprehend how the venerable Abbé, firm without severity, and tender without weakness, could educate this motherless child; but at fifteen years of age a young girl, endowed with beauty, grace, precocious talents, and a mind cultivated by serious studies, quitted the solitude of Livry, and dazzled the world from the first moment of her appearance.

What was then called the world consisted of the

* Léti is perhaps the greatest fabulist that has ever perverted history.—TRANSL.

Digitized by Google

aristocratic quarter of the Place Royale at Paris, a square planted with lime-trees and enclosed by four rows of dark colonnades; but this spot was inhabited by the *élite* of the nobility and literature of France; it was the vestibule of the Tuileries, the portico of the court; aspirants to honours, consideration, respect, renown, and reputation entered by that avenue. There are pavements which ennoble those who tread them. Pride, vanity, and pre-eminence of race or profession are so inherent in human nature, that they consider the arcade or window of the street they inhabit as exclusive as the throne in a palace. The family of Coulanges presented their youthful relative at court; her appearance, as described by Madame de la Fayette, the various records of her illustrious contemporaries, such as Ménage, Chapelain, Bussy-Rabutin, and the numerous portraits painted by the best artists of her day, account for and explain the universal admiration she attracted. She was surrounded by enthusiasm and love; her first experience of the world showed her only kindness in every glance that fell upon her; and this, which she owed to her own personal attractions opened her heart to gentle emotions. It is the privilege of beauty to bloom in an atmosphere of its own creation, to respire the same air, and to begin life under the influence of gratitude. The first regard bestowed by the public is a mirror, in which life either smiles or frowns in the eyes of a young female; and it has a lasting influence upon her existence, rendering the future either joyous or sad; she sees the shade of her

Digitized by Google

destiny revealed at a glance. The countenance of the world which beamed upon the beautiful orphan displayed only affection; she felt that Nature had created her to be the happy favourite not of a king, but of an age, and she from the first moment loved that world in return which had voluntarily bestowed its affection upon her.

Madame de la Fayette, whose wit and fashion had made her an authority in the aristocratic and literary circles of the seventeenth century, wrote to her upon her *début*: "I do not desire to overpower you with flattery, neither do I seek to amuse myself by telling you that your figure is admirable, your complexion has the tint of a rose; that your lips, teeth, and hair are all incomparable,—your glass can tell you this better than I can; but as you do not speak to your glass, it cannot show you what you are while talking. Know then, if by chance you are still in ignorance, that your varying expression so brightens and adorns your beauty, that when engaged in unconstrained conversation there is nothing on earth so brilliant as yourself. Every word you utter becomes you so well, that the sparkle of your wit adds to the brightness of your eyes, and though it is said language impresses only the ear, it is quite certain that yours, beaming from such a face, enchants the vision; and while listening to it, all acknowledge you to be the most beautiful creature in the world!"

Some years after this written description, the pencil of Mignard portrayed for us her rich locks of fair hair, crowned with a branch of orange-blossom, and rippling

Digitized by Google

above her forehead, like waves stirred by the breath of inspiration; her oval countenance, the roundness of the cheeks somewhat subdued by an expression of melancholy as they approach the mouth; a firm but delicately-shaped chin; a gently-rounded forehead, reflecting the light like a transparent thought; palpitating temples; dreamy blue eyes, fine folding eyelids of alabaster veined with azure, which half concealed the eyeball; a Grecian-shaped nose in a line with the forehead, its extremity terminated by the rising of the muscle between the rose-coloured wings of the nostrils; the lips closed, as though after a smile, and gradually resuming their usual expression of gravity; a fine delicate skin; a complexion in the fresh flower, which she had brought from her native hills, and which, according to the testimony of her contemporaries neither time nor sorrow ever faded; an expression so varying that it possessed as many shades as the sentiments of the female soul; the bust worthy of supporting such a head, the wide, falling shoulders, the full bosom, the slender waist,—everything that contributes to the dignity and harmony of motion or attitude, and gives to the female figure, when standing erect, an illimitable loveliness—making her image seem in our eyes to fill all space, and reach even to heaven. It is this imaginative illusion which gives to Madame de Sévigné in her portraits something beyond the ordinary standard of nature. We feel that the painter, enthusiastic as a lover, has spread an atmosphere of irradiation about her form: he has not delineated bounded

Digitized by Google

outlines, but has given us an infinitely poetical and intangible impression of beauty.

Such was the physiognomy whose varying attractions at eighteen, and even after forty years of age, stamped themselves imperishably upon the memory of those who had once seen Madame de Sévigné, were it only for an hour. There was but one opinion at court as regarded this wonder of the house of Coulanges. The adulation of the world produced no change in the young girl's modest deportment : in the solitude of her early days at Livry, in the study of serious books, and in the society of philosophers and Jansenists, who were her uncle's friends and neighbours, she had contracted a precocious power of reflection, a solid piety, a taste for intellectual pursuits, and grave reflection, which were more likely to render her a second Héloïse in the house of Fulbert than an evanescent favourite in a fickle court. Her name, her personal beauty, her fortune of three hundred thousand francs (a considerable sum at that epoch), her title of only daughter, which permitted the candidates for her hand to hope for her preference only through her heart, induced the sons of many of the noblest houses in France to seek her alliance ; but the choice fell upon Henri de Sévigné, or Sevigny, a young gentleman of Brittany, the relative and *protégé* of Cardinal de Retz. The Abbé de Coulanges, although a man of severe life, was united by the law of subordination and obedience to the coadjutor of the Archbishop of Paris. The giddy, debauched, and factious Cardinal de Retz, ever

Digitized by Google

wavering between petty intrigue, great ambition, and the voluptuous licentiousness of his age, was the mitred Alcibiades of the Fronde; it was impossible not to love him, but at the same time he was despised as a child to whom fortune for his amusement had assigned the nation, the Parliament, the Court, and the Church, and all of which he treated as a plaything. Nevertheless a certain popularity attached to his name by the Fronde, and a portion of respect paid by the Church to his ecclesiastical title, gave him at that time some consideration in the world; his sportive and fascinating wit covered the inconsistencies in his character; his fortune was believed in after it was dissipated. The Abbé de Coulanges entertained sanguine hopes for a young soldier patronized by the future Archbishop of Paris. Cardinal de Retz possessed genius sufficient to have raised himself to the rank of Richelieu or Mazarin, if he had not ruined his great expectations by engaging in small intrigues. Mademoiselle de Chantal saw only in the Marquis Henri de Sévigné a handsome face, a romantic courage, a martial elegance, a distinguished name at court, and an admiration for herself, with which she inspired all the youth of her time, but which she herself only felt towards him. But these attractions of the Marquis de Sévigné concealed, if not vices, unstable qualities of heart, habits, and character which could settle down to nothing, not even to happiness. The first experience of this young female, so worthy of constancy in a husband, exposed her to the trial of an affection ardent on her side, but light and fleeting

Digitized by Google

on that of Monsieur de Sévigné. Bussy says in his Memoirs: "He carried on amours in every direction, and never with any one to be compared with his wife; he respected without loving her; and she, on the contrary, loved him without the power to respect."

Marriage launched her into a new world. Factions, decapitated by the axe of Cardinal Richelieu, had, after his death, reunited and resuscitated their bleeding fragments in civil war. Richelieu had sown vengeance with blood: such is the natural consequence of terror. His executions are thought to have extinguished parties by means of punishment; on the contrary, he rendered them desperate, and therefore more implacable and more national: princes, nobles, the Parliament and the people flew to civil seditions, and took refuge in rebel armies from the scaffold and tyranny with which this Sylla of the scarlet robe had long terrified and overwhelmed them.

Mazarin, a thousand times an abler politician, because more inclined to peace and more humane, is considered by vulgar estimation a man of less colossal proportions than Richelieu, because the rule of policy makes less noise than the domination of terror, and the shallow-minded feel more reverence for force than wisdom; but in the judgment of philosophers and statesmen, Mazarin was the great minister, while Richelieu was the great avenger. The constant attachment of Anne of Austria to this counsellor of her regency, the dictatorship with which she invested him in the government as well as over her heart,—the alternately firm and

Digitized by Google

supple ability of this Italian himself, adopting no party. but acting as the neutralizer of all,—the art with which he balanced one against the other, and concluded, after not only vanquishing, but binding them hand and foot, by carrying them repentant, submissive, and obedient to the feet of a king but fourteen years of age, is a consummate masterpiece in the art of government.

It is precisely because this deep diplomacy, profound intelligence, accuracy of aim, power of negotiation, moderation, firmness, and patience, form such a complicated character, that is not yet understood; but it will be thoroughly appreciated: the name of Mazarin will rule the age of Louis XIV., for he equally made the king and the reign; and when he died in his bed at Vincennes, still holding the reins of empire in his hands, he surrendered France to the pupil of his genius as a father gives up to his son his office of guardian: factions were dissipated, the dissaffected had become changed into courtiers, and thus closed the account of his guardianship with the kingdom of France. How blind to their own interest are the people who esteem Richelieu and do not understand Mazarin!

Let opinion be as it may on this point, when Madame de Sévigné entered the world, Mazarin, who still reigned, had so pacified the country, that all civil, feudal, or parliamentary cabals had merged into simple factions of wit, letters, and taste. The literary genius of the age sprang from the general security; talent had time and freedom to increase and multiply beneath so mild a rule. That the reign of intellect should recommence

Digitized by Google

at the close of each long interval or impediment produced by war or revolution, is a law incidental to the human faculties. Civil agitations give to the ideas and imaginations of men repercussion, exercise, and impetuosity. The democratic convulsions of Athens were followed by the age of Pericles; the Roman proscriptions and the useless murder of Cæsar were succeeded by the reign of Augustus; the convulsions of the Italian republics by the rule of the Medici; after the League and the Fronde (the feudal wars of France) came the age of Louis XIV.; and finally, in our own days, the struggles of liberty, the overthrow of Europe, and the restoration (so salutary to literature) of the Bourbons, have caused an intellectual revival throughout the Continent,—a revival short as the Restoration, but one which will bequeath great names to posterity. Let us examine the birth of this literary age of Louis XIV., and inquire from whence sprang the glory that shone around his cradle.

The men and women recently born or verging on the close of life, who from the commencement of the century formed the chosen bank of intellectual giants, were—Malherbe, Corneille, Voiture, the first Balzac, Saint-Evremond, Sarrasin, Chapelain, Pélisson, Pascal, Bossuet, Molière, La Fontaine, Fénelon, Boileau, Racine, Flechier, Bourdaloue, La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère, Chaulieu, Madame de la Fayette, the Marchioness de Sablé, the Duchess de Longueville, Madame de Cornuel, and lastly, Madame de Sévigné herself,—still in the freshness of early youth, dazzled by all the brilliancy

Digitized by Google

that shone around her, and never imagining that her undistinguished name, apparently lost amidst the crowd, should at a future date survive almost all the great illustrators of the age we have here enumerated.

A young female of Italian origin, belonging to the Florentine house of Savelli, related to the Medici, the allies of our kings, had introduced into France the sentiment, delicacy, and refinement of Italian poetry; this lady was the wife of the Marquis de Rambouillet, a nobleman of high rank, an ambassador, and a courtier. Madame de Rambouillet married at sixteen, and still young and beautiful, possessed a daughter of fifteen, who resembled much more her sister than her child. The mother had inspired her with the same passion for letters and imaginative poetry that she herself had inhaled with the breezes of the Arno and amidst the hills of Tuscany: the young lady's name was Julie d'Angennes, an appellation since then entwined with garlands of verse. The memories and thoughts of these two women were deeply imbued with the stanzas of Tasso and Ariosto, the triplets of Dante, and the sonnets of Petrarch; they sought to prolong on this side of the Alps, in a language till that moment incomplete, the echoes of these divine poets, themselves the echoes of diviner originals who sang in the Augustan age. A similiarity of leisure and taste, in reading and conversation on intellectual subjects, attracted to their house all the men and women of the court and city who desired to cultivate their imaginations. These two ladies held their court of wit at the Hôtel de Ram-

Digitized by Google

bouillet, in the Place du Carrousel, side by side with the palace where Louis XIV. held his court of politics, ambition, and favour. The house of Madame de Rambouillet became the academy for the *delicate and inquisitive;* such was the denomination at that time bestowed upon those who, without following letters as a profession, drew around them assemblies of all that was most eminent amongst the poets, prose writers, and official graduates of the day.* Up to the present date these assemblies are to be found in Paris as they were of old in Rome, Athens, and Florence, presided over by women of superior cultivation and refined grace, and in which fashion and literature meet for mutual improvement and information.

There, in the noble emulation of mental enjoyments, and in an agreeable uniformity of worship for everything connected with intellect, are equally mixed those who admire with those who cultivate; some are attracted by the love of approbation, others by the desire to applaud, and not a few by the vanity of criticism. They form as a whole a preliminary focus, the precursor of the great centre of the age—a foretaste of public opinion and the vestibule of fame. Thus the much-calumniated Lucretia Borgia, in Rome; Eleonora d'Este, at Ferrara; Vittoria Colonna, at Naples; Madame de Rambouillet, at Paris, during the

* The *Blue-stocking* reunions at Mrs. Montague's, in London of a later date, appear to have been suggested by, and to form something like imitations of, these literary coteries at the hote of Madame de Rambouillet.—TRANSL.

Digitized by Google

minority of Louis XIV.; Madame de Maintenon, in the old-age of the same king; Madame du Deffant and Madame Geoffrin, under the reign of Louis XV.; the Duchess d'Anville, during that of Louis XVI.; Madame de Staël, in her exile during the Empire; Madame de Montcalm, Madame the Duchess de Broglie, Madame de Saint-Aulaire, Madame de Duras, under the Restoration; Madame Recamier, beneath the sway of the Directory, and afterwards under the three following reigns, up to our own days; and many others whose names we are interdicted by friendship from mentioning, have formed an elective female dynasty who have drawn the choicest spirits of their epoch around them by the sole attraction of their superiority and fascination. In this manner they have perpetuated their line from century to century without interruption, save by the recurrence of great civil convulsions and those abject periods when the world seems possessed by the frenzy of gold, and all the nobler passions of the soul are banished into shadow and silence. Such epochs have had but short duration; the eclipse of thought upon earth resembling the eclipse of light in the heavens. We can enumerate but three in France: the regency of the Duke of Orléans after the reign of Louis XIV.; the rule of the Directory after the Reign of Terror in 1793; and the present period, which hurries to enjoy itself in the fear of being surprised between two speculations, by a recurrence of the overthrows which have shaken the world to its foundations.

Madame de Sévigné, introduced by her husband to

Digitized by Google

the drawing-room of Madame de Rambouillet, carried thither all that could prove seductive to herself, while it charmed the society into which she was welcomed: youth, overflowing with life and beaming with the freshness of morning; resplendent beauty, without the least wish to dazzle or eclipse others; finally, an education beyond her age and sex, imbibed in the studious solitude of Livry: a tincture of the dead languages sufficient for the enjoyment of Homer and Virgil; a memory stored with the most exquisite masterpieces of Tasso and Ariosto, and a premature taste which, without taming her enthusiasm, soon gave her a power of discrimination which is generally the fruit of gradual experience. So many personal charms, and so much intellectual capacity, rendered her in a short space of time an object of general admiration to the circle in which she moved; she inspired friendship in the women, a sentiment of protection in the old men, and a warm passion of love in the younger and more inflammable portion of the community.

The license of manners encouraged by the publicity of the King's amours, and the still living traditions of the Fronde, when princesses were the seductive implements of factions; even the example of the Marquis de Sévigné, a fickle lover and inconstant husband, would have excused his young wife in forming any of the *liaisons* then countenanced by the lax regulations of society; but from these she was preserved equally by virtue and the faithful love she bore her husband: her name, so often loudly sung as the theme of poets,

Digitized by Google

was never uttered in the secret whisperings of the amorous chronicle of the court. In the passionate accents of her adorers she heard only agreeable speeches which flattered her ear without reaching her heart. Equally uninfluenced by pride or ostentation, she remained pure in the midst of corruption; all the poets of her time attest the absence of feelings which would have been so natural in her position when they accuse her of coldness. Such chastity was a rare exception in that voluptuous age; but she was unyielding without austerity; she seemed to solicit pardon rather than homage for her superior virtue; she played with the passions she inspired, without suffering herself to be even slightly grazed by them, and inhaled only the vapour of all the idolatry that lighted incense at her feet.

La Fontaine, Montreuil, Ménage, Segrais, Saint-Pavin, Benserade, and Racan have lauded her in emulative rivalry; the first addressed the following epigram to her upon the occasion of her appearing in some game with her eyes covered:—

"In every way the power to please you prove:
Each changing aspect adds another grace.
With bandaged eyes you seem the God of Love;
His mother, when whose eyes illume the face."

The Count du Lude and the Count de Bussy-Rabutin, the two most seductive men of the court, professed an adoration which flattered her, but which her love for her husband at once deprived of every hope of success. The Count du Lude, a noble and generous spirit, esti-

Digitized by Google

mated her more highly for her virtue ; Bussy-Rabutin, who was her cousin, never forgave such indifference. Possessed of all the vain weaknesses which empower the better feelings, his rejected love changed into bitter and implacable hatred ; from the public adorer of his cousin he became an anonymous pamphleteer in his 'Histoire Amoureuse des Gaules,' and endeavoured in the most despicable manner to tarnish the virtue over which he was unable to triumph.

Madame de Sévigné's fondest aspiration, in the midst of this atmosphere of praise, was to retire with the husband of her choice to a solitary and peaceful country life, far removed from the vanities and temptations of Paris. She succeeded in the spring of 1645 in enticing the Marquis de Sévigné to one of his estates in Brittany, in the neighbourhood of Vitré. This property, which had long been neglected, was called "Les Rochers." The old château became the home of her short-lived happiness, as Bourbilly had been that of her cradle. The spot recalled the abode of her infancy; its entangled gardens and crumbling walls attested the long absence of the owners, and the horizon bounded alike the view, the thoughts, and desires. The château was raised upon an eminence, at the base of which murmured a small river, following its course between blocks of granite rendered verdant by shrubs ; the few openings were darkened by the sleeping shadows of chestnuts, oaks, and beeches ; cultivated fields and green lawns dyed with the golden blossoms of the broom were bordered by hedges of holly and thorn ; wide plains

Digitized by Google

lay to the left, bounded by a curtain of fog, through which occasionally glistened the rays of the sun or the surface of some pond; the melancholy of the spot communicated itself to the mind; vestiges of former magnificence gave the house, notwithstanding, a stamp of antiquity and nobility. On the side of Vitré were long avenues planted with rows of old trees and paved with large blocks of broken and mouldering stone; the building was and is still composed of a low keep, flanked by two towers, the cornices of which were ornamented with heads of monsters roughly sculptured in stone; a third tower contained the winding staircase, which was traversed at intervals by a ray of light falling obliquely through loopholes in the massive walls; large bare halls, whose vaulted ceilings were supported by black beams, welcomed the young couple. Here they lived for several years, in a retirement which Madame de Sévigné occupied in the cares of affection, and her husband in seeking to re-establish his fortune, and to attain the distinctions which his native province could offer to a gentleman of high military rank.

In the month of March, 1647, Madame de Sévigné gave birth to a son at "the Rocks," who inherited his mother's heart and genius, and who, though not the passion, formed at least the amusement and consolation of her life. The following year bestowed upon her a daughter, who afterwards became Madame de Grignan, and who has been immortalized by her mother's tenderness. M. de Sévigné, having been recalled to the

Digitized by Google

army by the last war of the Fronde, induced his wife to return to Paris, which she reached with her two children at the same moment that the Regent, Anne of Austria, made her triumphal entry with the young king under the protection of Mazarin.

Civil war had contaminated cities with the military licentiousness of camps. The Marquis de Sévigné formed an attachment to a celebrated beauty, whose existence at Paris recalled that of the renowned historical courtesans of Athens and Rome. Their profession, with all its shameful conditions, was admissible to pagan civilization, but quite incompatible with the Christianity which a little later assumed such austere habits. The open outrage to public propriety committed by two women almost contemporaries, Marion de Lorme and Ninon de Lenclos, can only be accounted for by the consideration of two historical points—the introduction of Italian license at court by the Medici and their attendants, and the depraved habits which the French aristocracy had contracted by association with the camp, and from the camp had transplanted to the city. Ninon was the daughter of a gentleman of Touraine named Lenclos; her early developed beauty was brought to perfection by the education of a depraved father, who taught her that all excellence consisted in the art of seduction; he introduced her to the noblest and most refined circles of Paris, amongst which she exhibited herself from very early infancy as a musician and dancer. Her uncontrolled spirit, inconstant affections, and unchecked philosophy, rendered

Digitized by Google

her an object of attraction to every unprincipled libertine of the time. She never sold herself, but bestowed her favours voluntarily on many; thus boldly casting aside modesty, to maintain her liberty. This reserve of independence in vice, and affectation of sentiment in license, gained her admission into the unscrupulous circles of men of letters, and the less particular society of women who valued wit and beauty more than virtue. She constantly frequented the house of the poet Scarron, which then formed the centre of light literature; and the young and beautiful orphan of the house of Aubigné, espoused to Scarron, became her friend. This strange bond continued to exist even after the death of Scarron; and the historian is overwhelmed with astonishment when he discovers the young, pious, and irreproachable widow, destined a few years later to ascend the couch of Louis XIV. as his wedded wife, sharing the lodging, the society, and sometimes the bed of Ninon the courtesan.

The Count of Bussy-Rabutin, in order to detach his cousin's heart from her husband, that he himself might become her consoler and seducer, informed Madame de Sévigné of M. de Sévigné's passion for Ninon. The grief of the faithful wife almost broke her heart, but did not incline it to yield to the seductive artifices of De Bussy; she indignantly closed her door against him, and feigned disbelief of her husband's infidelity. The memoirs of that period say, "Sévigné is not an honest man; he destroys the happiness of his wife, who is the best and most forgiving woman in Paris."

Digitized by Google

In order to save the wreck of his niece's fortune, and to secure something for her children, the Abbé de Coulanges induced her to make an arrangement for separate maintenance; but, while she took this precaution, she became security for a large sum, comprising the entire debts of her husband at that period, and then retired to "the Rocks" with her two children, leaving the Marquis to the free enjoyment of his irregular life.

This volatile sensualist had attached himself to another celebrated beauty, the rival of Ninon, Madame de Gondran, but better known by the more familiar appellation of Lolo. The Chevalier d'Albret, a younger son of the house of Miossens, disputed his conquest. Sévigné triumphed by the combined power of prodigality and passion. This rivalship excited much conversation in Paris; a duel was predicted, and some friends wrote prematurely to Madame de Sévigné at "the Rocks," informing her that her husband had been wounded by his opponent. She addressed him in a letter of grief, despair, and pardon. Report had anticipated matters; the duel was put off, and through this accident De Sévigné received the tender reproaches and last farewell of the being whose happiness he had betrayed for a caprice.

The day appointed for the duel arrived; the proceedings were courtly and chivalrous; the two combatants explained and embraced, before drawing their swords to satisfy a barbarous usage which France calls *honour*.

Sévigné received a mortal wound, and died in the

Digitized by Google

twenty-seventh year of his age and the flower of his life.

His wife, who admitted his youth, his gay temperament, and the customs of the time, as an excuse for all his conduct, with difficulty survived the intelligence of this sad catastrophe, and flew to Paris in order to gain possession of every beloved relic; but nothing of her husband remained to her save proofs of his inconstancy. She was compelled to demand the portrait and hair of him she had so loved from Madame de Gondran (otherwise Lolo), the cause of her affliction. Madame de Gondran remitted to her the hair and the portrait: they were a cruel consolation; and whenever the unfortunate widow gazed on the likeness of him she had adored, his image recalled the bitter memory of his ingratitude and abandonment. The grief of Madame de Sévigné was so deep and lasting, that she never afterwards could bear the sight of the Chevalier d'Albret or of either of the seconds, if by accident she saw them at a distance, without falling into a swoon.

Sévigné had been her first love, and was destined to be her last. From the moment of his death she shrouded her heart, and interred it, as we may say, still in the full bloom of youth and life, with the ashes of her husband.

Madame de Sévigné's soul was already filled with another emotion—the affection she bore her children, and pre-eminently her daughter. She for ever renounced all idea of a second marriage, which would

Digitized by Google

have bestowed on them another father, and shrank with horror from contemplating that the cherished fruits of her only love should be rivalled in her affection by the offspring of a future union. She devoted herself exclusively to their happiness, welfare, and education: the wife existed no longer; nothing remained but the mother. She wrote thus in old age: "I have effaced from my memory every date of my life save those of my marriage and widowhood." Beneath the protection of her uncle, the kind Abbé de Coulanges, she occupied many long years in endeavouring to retrieve the moderate fortune which her husband's extravagance had nearly ruined, and in the rural management of the estates of Bourbilly and "the Rocks." She passed half the year with the Abbé de Coulanges at his own country residence; the rest in Paris or at Livry, the cherished home of her youth. She had relaxed without severing the ties which united her with the world. She foresaw that her son would require patrons at court, and her daughter a husband suited to her birth; she therefore continued to cultivate every friendship likely to prove advantageous to her children. Her sound judgment induced her to form no connexion with those who belonged to extreme parties. She believed herself possessed of no right to dispose of her own destiny while that of her son and daughter was unfixed. She remained in the world from a sense of duty, and continued amiable from virtue and natural inclination. Society, which had received her with such universal enthusiasm, passion-

Digitized by Google

ately regretted her absence; she enjoyed and retained a large amount of popularity in the court and drawing-room, inasmuch as she had entered them with a disengaged heart, and had asked only for friendship.

It was during this epoch that she reckoned amongst her friends the most celebrated men and remarkable women of a period abounding with illustrious names. In the addresses of her letters may be found a catalogue of all the high reputations, the most exalted merit, and the most elevated greatness of her time:—the Prince de Condé; the Duke de Rohan; the Count du Lude, ever in love, though always repulsed; Ménage; Marigny; the Cardinal de Retz; Montmorency; Brissac; Bellièvre; Montrésor; Châteaubriand; De Chaulnes; Caumartin; D'Hacqueville; Corbinelli; the two Arnaults, the fathers of Jansenism; Pascal, their apostle; D'Humières; D'Argenteuil; Bussy, ever amorous, ever importunate, and often perfidious through resentment; Sablonnière; the Scotchman Montrose, the heroic martyr of his proscribed king; the Duchess de Longueville, the disheartened spirit of the Fronde, which had been extinguished in spite of all her efforts to revive it; the Duchess de Lesdiguières; the Duchess de Montbazon; the Princess Palatine, for whom Cinq-Mars had died upon the scaffold; Madame Henriette de Coulanges, the sister of the Abbé; Madame de Lavardin; Madame de Maintenon; Mademoiselle de la Vallière; Madame de Montespan; Mademoiselle de Lavergne; Henriette d'Angennes, who had become the Countess d'Olonne, and was then celebrated for her beauty and afterwards for her

Digitized by Google

irregularities; Madame de la Fayette, the friend of the great Duke de la Rochefoucauld, the author of the 'Maxims;' Rochefoucauld himself, the fastidious judge and sovereign arbiter of pretension and elegance; De Vardes; Turenne; Bossuet; Corneille; Fénelon; Racine; Molière; La Fontaine; Boileau,—all of whom appeared and disappeared by turns on the horizon of this stupendous age. Such was the society in which Madame de Sévigné passed her entire life; such were her friends and correspondents, or the subjects of her epistolary compositions. If a past century, revivified in her letters, owes much to the charm which her pen has shed over it, it cannot be denied that her letters are indebted to the unparalleled interest of the period to which they refer.

Several of the men we have named, who were still young and had already become illustrious, earnestly endeavoured to efface the memory of her husband from the heart of the beautiful widow; amongst others, the Prince de Conti and the Superintendent-General of Finances, the all-powerful Fouquet, besieged her with their addresses; but Fouquet appears to be the only exception who ever produced the slightest impression upon her heart. Young, handsome, respectfully observant of forms, aspiring in mind, with the treasures of France as completely at his disposal as they had ever been under Richelieu or Mazarin, holding the reins of government in his own hands, sufficiently powerful to become an object of well-founded suspicion to his young sovereign, audacious enough to rival the King

Digitized by Google

in love,—Fouquet professed himself openly the ardent adorer of Madame de Sévigné. If she did not reciprocate, she at least felt grateful for a homage, the *éclat* of which obliterated so many others. To be the ruling passion of a man who was the object of the thoughts, love, and ambition of every lady of the court, induced Madame de Sévigné to pardon the boldness both of his public and private worship. This is the only instance during her long widowhood in which we can discover the slightest return of feeling for all the tender sentiments she inspired without rewarding them with encouragement; it forms also the peculiar misfortune of Fouquet, that he only should have been able to penetrate the surface of the tender sentiments which lay buried in the depths of Madame de Sévigné's soul. If she had ever really loved him, her preference only revealed itself in the tears she shed for the subsequent calamities of a man whom she had never acknowledged by any title more warm than that of friend.

The blow which fell upon the ambitious minister was for a long time suspended over his head; the dissimulation necessary to kings, inculcated by Mazarin in his last words on his death-bed, upon Louis XIV., slowly and secretly prepared everything to prevent the rebound of the coming shock from shaking the throne. Colbert, a man of honest and firm intentions, but also servile, ungrateful, and envious, was the King's sole confidant. During the last months of Mazarin's existence, Colbert, although the creature of Fouquet, and intimately acquainted with his affairs, betrayed,

Digitized by Google

in a secret letter to Mazarin, the embezzlements and alteration of figures in his accounts, by means of which Fouquet concealed the true state of the public exchequer. This denunciation by Colbert aroused the attention of Mazarin, but his death prevented the examination of the offence. Louis XIV., instructed by Mazarin, suspected Fouquet of peculation without daring to accuse him; the urgent necessities of the public finance withheld him from examining too closely the conduct of his Superintendent, whose able speculations had alone supplied at the beginning of his reign the resources that were absolutely required for the administration of the kingdom and the luxuries of the court.

But Louis XIV. doubted more than Fouquet's honesty in pecuniary matters: he disbelieved his political fidelity, and thought him capable of exciting fresh factions against his master, in order that he might gain undisputed possession of the administration of affairs and become another Richelieu under a second Louis XIII.; or a leader of faction against a court of which he was no longer the prime minister. Everything indicates that these suspicions were well founded; and if there was not sufficient evidence to warrant Fouquet's downfall, his conduct was doubtful enough to place the King upon his guard and to justify Louis in anticipating one blow by another. Ladies and poets in the pay of the Minister wept his disgrace; but judges and statesmen have absolved the King from the charge of ingratitude. Fouquet displayed riches and magnificence

Digitized by Google

drawn from a source too inexhaustible to be a pure one; by gifts, pensions, and regal donations he bought every man and woman who could gain for him dominion over the thoughts and even the amours of his master; he organized a party ready at any time to form itself into a league against the State. The papers and boxes found after his imprisonment in his house at Vaux enclosed the tariff of his corruptions, and the scale by which he had purchased his culpable popularity. Not content with the possession of several fortresses in the kingdom, he fortified Belle-Isle, on the coast of Brittany, to form a solid basis of operations, and an impregnable retreat in which to carry out his designs; he even had the audacity to tempt the ambition of Anne of Austria, the young King's mother, and made a proposition to her that they should mutually control the cabinet. He also negotiated with Cardinal de Retz the price of his resignation of the Archbishopric of Paris, that he might obtain the entire control of the clergy, as he already domineered over the court. His post of Attorney-General to the Parliament of Paris, which he had the precaution to retain, bestowed on him the privilege of being judged only by the Parliament, whose favour, ever to be obtained by sedition and intrigue, he was certain of possessing. Therefore, to secure his downfall, it became necessary to deceive him, and by holding out the bait of a still higher honour, to obtain his abandonment of his parliamentary office. The King succeeded, by overwhelming him with expectations and leading him to consider his

Digitized by Google

inferior functions incompatible with those to which he was about to be appointed. It was likewise requisite to use against him, in the form of an accusation, the means by which, at a remote period, he had gained and placed in the treasury the millions required for the public expenses, and which his unprincipled speculation in the funds and on the exchange had alone enabled him to accumulate. A particular circumstance, without being the actual cause, hurried on the catastrophe.

At a *fête* given to Louis XIV. by his Superintendent at the Château de Vaux, while the young King was traversing the private apartments of this magnificent dwelling, he entered a cabinet of pictures, and his eye fell upon a portrait of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, the well-known object of his first passion. Fouquet had been bold enough to love her, and had dared to have her portrait taken. The King, insulted by this profanation of his own attachment, in the meantime concealed his anger; the fitting hour for it to burst forth had not yet arrived. Fouquet was warned by his mother, through the Duchess de Chevreuse, to distrust the feigned security which surrounded him. The King redoubled his favour and his false professions, in order to lull the Minister's alarms. Fouquet, not knowing whether to believe or suspect, was undecided as to taking refuge in Italy, or seeking security in Belle-Isle. In this perplexity he set out for Nantes, and there, beyond the reach of the Parliament and far from Paris, the King resolved to have him arrested. Scarcely had Fouquet set out, before Louis (suspicious of all the

Digitized by Google

instruments of his authority, who might perhaps be in the pay of the Superintendent) summoned to his presence an obscure officer of his guard, and gave him an order to arrest Fouquet upon his arrival at Nantes. The officer departed with six trusty companions, reached Nantes before the Minister, and carried him back as a prisoner to Paris. His papers, seized and brought to the King, were examined by him alone, and revealed at full the plots, intrigues, and unbounded ambition of Fouquet. It has been said that the name of Madame de Sévigné appeared amongst those of the ladies whom he enumerated as friends, and upon whom he intended to lavish all the favour of his personal attachment and political power. It is to this discovery, of which Madame de Sévigné remained in utter ignorance, that we attribute the coldness which Louis always displayed towards her, the most eminent woman of his age. There were two things which he never freely forgave in those who constituted his immediate circle, of either sex; the sin of having been connected with the Fronde, and the crime of possessing brilliant superiority of mind. All celebrity which was not employed to elevate his own, obscured it. He encouraged talent only when he could encase it as an ornament in his crown, and he considered flattery the first obligation of genius.

Though Madame de Sévigné was a courtier, her heart was not servile, and the misfortunes of Fouquet only tended to increase her feelings of attachment and gratitude; nor did she sacrifice any portion of her sorrow and pity from complacency for the opinions of

Digitized by Google

the King. The disgrace of the Superintendent excited so tender and bold an interest in her breast, that she ventured to murmur, and even to oppose his persecutors. She joined the league of fidelity and misfortune which followed Fouquet into the presence of his judges, and even to his perpetual imprisonment. It was the warmth of this sentiment which first brought forth her epistolary powers in her daily correspondence with the friends of her friend. Friendship revealed her talent to herself; everything, even fame, came from a pure source, in a heart formed only for gentle emotions. Her expressions concerning Fouquet exhibit a tone of tenderness and natural feeling which we seek in vain in the rest of her correspondence. The accents of such tender pity for the unfortunate are so strongly conveyed, that we may almost imagine them the voice of subdued love.

At this period Louis XIV. had not attained the tyrannical despotism which afterwards induced him to proscribe many without trial. He caused the conduct of his minister to be examined by men who, if not independent judges, were at least commissioners reputed to exercise freedom of opinion. The trial was long, difficult, and full of turnings and windings, revelations, hope, and alternations of terror and despair. Madame de Sévigné followed all its phases with the anxiety of a friend sincerely attached to the accused, and seeking to support and encourage him with her presence, her influence and attachment, when before his judges. The private papers found at his house contained an intimate

Digitized by Google

but perfectly innocent correspondence between the attractive woman and the tender-hearted minister. This discovery, which made known many important secrets and alarmed a host who were implicated, surprised without disconcerting Madame de Sévigné. With the security of an innocent conscience, she braved the public murmur raised against her upon the reading of her letters, and wrote as follows to M. de Pomponne, a member of the pious family of the Arnaulds, and a friend and neighbour of her uncle the Abbé de Coulanges. "There is nothing truer than that friendship increases where the feeling of interest is mutual. You have written to me so kindly upon this topic, that I cannot reply more appropriately than by assuring you that I entertain towards you the same sentiments that you express for me. But what do you say to the contents of these boxes? could you have thought that my poor letters would have been found in such a mysterious place? I assure you, no matter how much credit I may gain from those who do me the justice of believing that I have had no other intercourse with *him* than this, I cannot help feeling deeply distressed at being compelled to justify myself, and very probably without success, in the estimation of a thousand people who will never believe the simple truth. I know you will fully understand the grief this causes to a heart like mine. I conjure of you to say all you feel; at this moment I cannot have too many friends. I impatiently expect the arrival of your brother [the Abbé Arnauld d'Andilly], that I may obtain some consolation from

Digitized by Google

him under these untoward circumstances. In the meantime I ceaselessly desire, with my whole heart, alleviation for the unfortunate, and I entreat of you always to bestow upon me the solace of your friendship." Some days later she wrote to Ménage : "Thank Mademoiselle de Scudéry for remaining so courageously faithful in her friendship for Fouquet, and for having defended me against all calumnious insinuations upon this subject. I wish with all my heart they would forget the existence of the Superintendent himself."

In the letters which she wrote afterwards from her retreat at the Rocks, to the two Arnaulds, who were exiled on account of Fouquet, she never calls the accused anything but our *dear friend*. She knew that her letters would be unsealed by the enemies of Fouquet, and she ventured to brave them ; she shed courageous tears for his fate, and followed with eye and ear his position and replies during the examinations. She wrote to M. de Pomponne : "Our dear and unfortunate friend has spoken this morning for two hours but so admirably that many cannot help admiring him ; amongst others, M. Rénard, who remarked, 'It must be confessed that this is an incomparable man.' He has never spoken so well in Parliament ; he has more self-possession now than he has ever shown before. He spoke upon the six millions and upon his own expenses ; nothing can be compared with the manner in which he treated this subject. I will write to you on Thursday or Friday, and Heaven grant that my letter may convey to you what I so ardently desire !

Digitized by Google

Entreat our solitary [Arnauld] to pray for our poor friend. . . . Our dear friend has again been summoned to the bar. The Abbé d'Effiat saluted him in passing; he returned his salute with that bright, steady glance we are all so well acquainted with. The Abbé d'Effiat was so touched that he became quite overpowered.

"This trial will continue throughout the whole of next week. During the interval, the life we endure is scarcely existence: as for me, I am so altered that I am scarcely recognisable, and I doubt if I shall be able to bear up so long.

"At the bottom of my heart there is a little gleam of hope; I know not whence it comes, nor whither it will lead. It is not even enough to enable me to sleep in peace. I only see those to whom I can speak of it, and who entertain the same feelings with myself. She (Madame du Plessis) hopes as I do, but without being able to assign any reason. But why do you hope? Because I hope. Such are our mutual answers. Are they not very reasonable ones? If we should obtain such a verdict as we wish for, the completion of my joy will be to send a messenger at full speed on horseback to convey the agreeable intelligence to you; and the delight of imagining your happiness will drown my own." Again she writes: "I do not know what I shall do if this affair does not terminate as I wish; I cannot tell what will become of me."

She proudly repeats all that was worthy, and affectionately blames every imprudent word in the replies

Digitized by Google

of the accused. She deplores some impatience displayed by Fouquet towards his judges: "Such a deportment is not well-timed," she said to Arnauld, "he must correct it; but in truth his patience is exhausted. and I think I should act precisely as he does, were I in the same situation." She returned to Paris at the moment when the fate of her friend was about to be decided; she gave herself up exclusively to this single thought; she lived alternately upon hope and fear; she wished to behold him for the last time when he appeared before the tribunal; she disguised herself, concealed her face beneath the mask then in ordinary use, to hide the paleness and agitation of her features. "My limbs trembled, and my heart beat so fast when he appeared," said she, "that I felt ready to faint." She wrote in the evening: "I do not think he recognised me; but I confess to you I was quite overcome when he entered through the small door. If you knew the misery of having such a heart as mine, you would pity me. I have been to see our dear neighbour Madame de Guénégaud; we talked incessantly of the dear prisoner. She has seen *Sappho* (Mademoiselle de Scudéry), who has inspired her with courage. As for me, to-morrow I shall again visit this beloved friend, for I feel in want of comfort. A thousand things are said which ought to create hope, but I possess such a lively imagination that uncertainty is death to me." Afterwards, indignant almost to rebellion against the Government, she said, "Sympathy is great, but severity is greater still." She ersonally solicited D'Ormesson,

Digitized by Google

the reporter of the process, as though it had been in her own cause.

"*Fouquet is a dangerous man!*" said the King at his levee, a few days before judgment was to be pronounced. This observation contained his sentence; nevertheless Madame de Sévigné would not yet despair of justice and mercy. She wrote: "All the world are interested in this momentous affair; people can speak of nothing else. They argue, they speculate on the result, they count opinions upon their fingers. Some are confident; others fear, wish, hate, admire, are miserable or despondent. In truth, my dear Sir, we are all in a most extraordinary state of excitement. The resignation and firmness of our beloved prisoner are divine! He knows each day everything that occurs, and volumes might be written in his praise."

Who cannot recognise in these expressions a sentiment beyond the desire of justice and the sympathy of friendship? Madame de Sévigné was more to Fouquet than lover or friend; she was an invisible Providence, attached to the same chains by which he was bound, and ready to live the same life or die the same death. On the evening of the 19th of December, 1664, she wrote: "Praise God, Sir, and thank Him! our poor friend is saved. I am so happy that I am almost beside myself. . . . I am ready to expire with the fear that any other than myself should give you the pleasure of learning the good news. It will be a long time before the joy of yesterday can fade away."

When Madame de Sévigné learnt that the King had

Digitized by Google

increased the sentence of exile into perpetual imprisonment at Pignerol, she wrote: "No! this cannot spring from such a lofty source: this unrelenting and despicable vengeance could never proceed from the heart of our master. They belie and profane his name, as you will see. I will communicate to you the result."

On Monday, the 23rd, she wrote in another tone: "Many hope that the sentence may be mitigated: I hope so too. Hope has been too long my support for me to abandon it now; nevertheless, every time that I behold our royal master at the court *ballets*, these two lines of Tasso recur to my mind:

"'Goffredo ascolta, e in rigida sembianza
Porge più di timor che di speranza.'

Meanwhile I endeavour not to be discouraged; we must follow the example of our poor prisoner: he is gay and tranquil, let us be so likewise."

Despite the sentence uttered by Louis, the conscience of his judges could not sacrifice the head of Fouquet, and they therefore condemned him to perpetual exile. The King, considering the punishment too mild, and Fouquet at liberty, too dangerous, even though removed from the kingdom, exerted his despotic authority, and changed the sentence into one of imprisonment for life in the fortress of Pignerol. There he lingered through fifteen years, dying by degrees, forgotten by all but Madame de Sévigné; and not an echo from the world, which had once resounded with his name, ever pierced the walls of his dungeon. From the severity of the chastisement, we may judge of the

Digitized by Google

fear with which the Minister had inspired his master. The only tender sentiment which Madame de Sévigné entertained after her widowhood, was buried for ever in the cell of her unfortunate friend. Her heart, ever afterwards void of woman's affection, was exclusively devoted to her children. She no longer held intercourse with the world on her own account, but merely that she might transmit its impressions to her daughter and her friends, through the medium of her quiescent sensibilities,—like an unconcerned spectator of the drama of life, who, gazing from the amphitheatre upon the passing scene, describes it in a subdued tone to those who remain outside.

From this period the whole of Louis XIV.'s reign is reflected in the written conversation of a woman. Her correspondence, unknown to herself, became the whisperings of history behind the scenes on which the great drama of the world was acting. This was also the date from which her style flowed from her heart, warm and unaffected; and natural simplicity became unconscious talent. Let us add a few words on this subject.

Buffon says, "*The style shows the man.*" Buffon has said in this what the style ought to do rather than what it does, for generally the style embodies the writer more than the individual man. Art interposes itself between the composer and that which he executes; it is not the man you behold, but his talent, and the highest achievement of truly great writers is to lay aside acquired talent, and express their own notions;

Digitized by Google

but to possess the power of doing this, their sensibilities must be more perfect than their art: in fact, they must be proved great rather by the heart than by the ability. How many books are there in each century, or indeed in all centuries, which bear this character, and convey a more powerful impression of soul than of genius? Three or four, perhaps. The book almost always masks it author. Wherefore? Because the book is an effort of composition and intellect, in which the author proposes some particular aim, and in which he portrays himself, not as he is, but as he wishes to appear. We must not search in books for true expression; it is not to be found in them: yet I mistake—it is there, but only in those books which men have written without considering them as such; to speak plainly, in letters. Letters contain natural ideas, books those which are derived from education: clothing veils the shape. In composition, as in sculpture, nothing is really beautiful except nudity. Nature created flesh; man has added the artificial drapery. If you would look upon the masterpiece, you must strip the statue: this equally applies to the mind and the body. That which we like in good writers is not their work, but their individuality; those efforts in which they most reflect themselves we consider their best. Who would not a thousand times prefer one of Cicero's letters to one of his orations? or a familiar epistle of Voltaire, to one of his laboured tragedies? or a letter of Madame de Sévigné, to all the romances of Mademoiselle de Scudéry —she whom the former denominated Sappho, and whose

Digitized by Google

fame she gazed upon from a distance, without venturing to raise her own ambition to a similar height? These superior minds have displayed great artistic talent in their premeditated effusions, but genuine and natural style is found only in their correspondence. We again ask, why is this? The answer is, because in that they composed without either the desire or effort to excel. Like Madame de Sévigné, their emotions were the result of circumstance; they did not write, they conversed. Their style ceased to be composition, and became the genuine effusion of their thoughts.

Of all mental qualities the one which appears to us the most inexplicable is style of expression; and if we sought to define it, we should endeavour to do so by its analogy with a thing in itself as yet undefinable—the human physiognomy. We ought therefore to denominate mode of expression, the physiognomy of the thoughts.

Examine closely any particular countenance, and try to comprehend why it charms, repulses, or produces indifference. Does the secret of this indifference, charm, or repulsion lie in such or such a feature?—in the regular or irregular oval of its contour?—in the outline, more or less Grecian?—in the prominent or sunken eyeball, its colour or its brightness?—in the perfect or imperfect shape of the lips, or in the shade of the complexion? You cannot tell; you will never be able to explain it. The general impression is a mystery, and this mystery is denominated physiognomy; it is the counter-stamp of the character upon the visage;

Digitized by Google

it is the combined and animated assemblage of all the features, dispersed, and floating like an atmosphere of soul over the face. This atmosphere is composed of so many hues that the man who feels cannot disunite them. He likes or he dislikes: herein lies the entire analysis. Opinion is not so much a rapid impression as an instinct, infallible as the sensation we experience in plunging our hand into hot, cold, or tepid water: while we gaze on the countenance we feel the soul to be either warm or cold, and this is the only conclusion we are permitted to reach.

The same conclusion applies to writing. We know whether it charms or wearies, warms or freezes us; but it is composed of so many indefinable elements of intelligence, thought, and feeling, that it is as great a mystery to us as the physiognomy; and as it resembles it in effect, so do we find it equally impossible to analyse the cause: rhetoricians have no more been able to teach or grapple with it, than chemists have been permitted to seize the principle of life pervading the elements they elaborate; they know what it produces, but not what it is. And how should they obtain that knowledge? The writer does not comprehend it himself; it is as much a gift of nature as the colour of his hair or the sensibility of his feeling. Let us only enumerate a few of the many conditions of what is called style of expression, and then judge if it be in the power of rhetoric to create such a union of different qualities in man or woman.

Its first requisite is truth, and language should be

Digitized by Google

shaped by internal impression, otherwise it is false in spirit, and resembles more the performance of an artificial actor than the discourse of a man expressing what he really feels. It must possess perspicuity, without which meaning will be lost in the multiplication of words, and sense embarrassed in obscurity. It must also flow with ease, or the evident labour of the writer will oppress the mind of the reader, and the fatigue experienced by the one will be communicated to the other. It must have transparency, or its depth of thought cannot be penetrated. It must be simple, or the understanding will be surprised and overtasked in an effort to follow the refinements of expression; and while admiring the phraseology the sense will evaporate. It should possess colouring, or it will seem opaque though accurate, and the subject will be a simple outline without light or shadow. It requires imagery, or the subject merely described cannot be illustrated and become palpable to the senses. It must be restrained, or redundancy will satiate; it must be rich, for poverty of expression demonstrates absence of imagination; it must be unassuming, for undue brilliancy dazzles; it must be copious, for meagreness depresses; it must be natural, for thought is disfigured by the contortions of artifice; the current of ideas must be rapid, for motion alone entrains and carries us along. It must glow, for gentle heat is the temperature of the soul; it must be without effort, for that which is achieved with difficulty becomes wearisome; it must change from simple to sublime, for uniformity tires; it

Digitized by Google

must appeal to the reason, because man is an argumentative being; it must touch the passions, for the heart is passion itself; it must converse, for reading is intercourse with the absent and the dead; it must have the stamp of identity and the mark of individual mind, for no man bears exact resemblance to another; it must be lyrical, for the soul has its music as well as the voice; it must weep, for human nature has its sighs and tears; it must—but pages would not suffice to enumerate all the elements which compose *style*. No one has ever united them in written language and with such harmony as Madame de Sévigné; she ceases, then, to be a mere writer, and becomes an embodiment of style.

Let us now return to her life, which she has read to all who desire to find themselves in the history of others. While listening to her recital, we feel as though we repeated our own existence, because her book is not merely a volume, but a life in itself. A single passion replaced in her heart the absorbing affection she had felt for her husband: this passion was her daughter. No other woman ever was so completely a mother. If we detach her daughter from the soul and from the letters of Madame de Sévigné, nothing will remain but a wide vacuum, without motion, warmth, or echo, in which there is no palpitation, not even that of the heart.

By a phenomenon of maternal instinct, which bears almost as strong a resemblance to a natural miracle as to a prodigy of affection, the mother who had given

Digitized by Google

birth to her daughter fifteen years before, seemed to carry this fruit of her womb still attached to the fibres of her being: she warmed it with her own heat, vivified it with her own life, and lived only in its existence; vanity, ambition, society, friendship, the world, nature, even Deity itself, she only knew and felt but in this child. Her daughter was the link between her and the universe: but if the latter had vanished, and her daughter alone had remained to her, she would not have been sensible of the absence of the whole creation. We are bound to admit this extravagance of maternal instinct in Madame de Sévigné, which must be designated a species of madness, before we can thoroughly comprehend such an absolute connexion of existence with another, and the utter annihilation of her own personal individuality in that of her daughter.

The fables of antiquity present no parallel case; neither the "Inferno" nor the "Paradiso" of Dante contains such a total identification of one being with another, such a constant alternation of happiness and punishment, sometimes joy and as frequently sorrow, as we shall presently find when we examine this extraordinary instance, which we know to have occurred in living reality.

After having adored and educated her daughter during childhood in the privacy of her solitude, Madame de Sévigné introduced her to the society of Paris and the court; and if she felt it a sacrifice to part with her treasure, her maternal pride, the holiest of all vanities, intoxicated her beforehand with the anti-

Digitized by Google

cipated rapture inspired by the admiration which she felt convinced would follow her daughter's appearance in the great world. The unselfish expectation was realized to the full extent, and indeed merited such a result. The poetry and private memoirs of the time express the same opinion that the mother entertained of her daughter's charms. Ménage denominates her "the miracle of our days;" even the satirist Bussy always speaks of her as "the prettiest girl in France." She outshone the dazzling group of celebrated beauties who figured in the *ballets* of Louis XIV., during the rejoicing and festivities given at Fontainebleau. It was generally supposed that, to the envy of her fair contemporaries, she would fascinate the young King himself, and become the favourite of the opening reign. But whether it was that Louis still entertained too much of his early resentment against the name of Sévigné, which had been so prominently mixed up with the Fronde,—whether Mademoiselle de Sévigné, so exclusively the object of her mother's worship, felt herself placed above even a King's addresses,—or whether she possessed more of the brilliancy which gains admiration than the charm which creates love, the King, though courteous, remained quite insensible to such an array of attractions.

Mademoiselle de Sévigné, who possessed a mind equal to, but of a different mould from that of her mother, was herself sensible that her beauty was more surprising than seductive. She wrote thus to her mother: "At first sight people think me adorable,

Digitized by Google

but upon further acquaintance they love me no longer." Madame de Sévigné, whose ambition centred entirely in her daughter, aspired to the hope that she would connect herself by marriage with one of the most exalted names of the court. Birth, beauty, and fortune justified this presumption, but the daughter's coldness, and probably the secret dislike entertained by the King for her mother, banished all pretenders.

"The prettiest girl in France presents her compliments to you" (she wrote to her cousin Bussy): "this appears a most alluring title; nevertheless I am getting tired of enjoying the honour so long." Bussy replied, "I recognise the caprice of destiny in the difficulty of obtaining a suitable match for the prettiest girl in France." "The prettiest girl in France," rejoined her mother, "is more than ever worthy of your homage, notwithstanding her destiny is so difficult to understand that it quite confounds me."

The explanation of that which was such a source of grief and humiliation to the mother, lay exclusively in the fear entertained by all the noble families at court, of participating in the disgrace of a woman whose youth had been connected with political factions now dead, and whose present intimacy with the Arnaulds who were tainted with Jansenism, allied her to the new religious sects which were beginning to spring up.

She describes these recluses with an infinite charm: "I returned yesterday," she says, "from Meni, where I had gone to see M. d'Andilly. I remained with him six hours, during which time I participated in all the

Digitized by Google

delight afforded by the conversation of a superior man. I also met there my uncle De Sévigné, but only for a moment. The Port-Royal is a Thebaïs, a paradise, and a solitude where all the devotion of Christianity is assembled: its sanctity embraces the circumference of a league. There are five or six recluses, with whom no one holds intercourse, and who live like the penitents of Saint-Jean Climaque; the nuns are angels upon earth; Mademoiselle de Vertus passes her life here in the midst of inconceivable sufferings and unmurmuring resignation; everything connected with the establishment, even to the shepherds, waggoners, and workpeople, is of the same modest and restrained character. I declare to you I was enchanted at an opportunity of beholding this divine solitude, of which I had heard so much: it is a frightful valley, from which the world is excluded, and the minds of the inmates are occupied with the care of salvation alone. I returned to Meni to sleep, and yesterday came back here, after having again embraced M. d'Andilly as I passed by."

Madame de Sévigné deemed it advisable to conceal herself and daughter for a time in the solitude of her country-seat, that the unlucky star might pass away, and Paris be left to regret that which it no longer possessed. She retired to Brittany, and passed an entire winter at the Rocks. This absence, in fact, awoke the regrets upon which her vexation had counted; she was assailed by prose and verse, in which friends, admirers, and poets lamented her departure, and entreated her return to the centre of wit and

Digitized by Google

pleasure, which had been obscured by the withdrawal of her light. Saint-Savin, in a familiar epistle, presented himself as the commissioned interpreter of these regrets, and in the expression of his passion he thus flattered her :—

> " Nature ne'er her task completed,
> But when she thy fair daughter framed;
> All other forms her power defeated,
> As though she dreamily had aim'd:
> Too small the earth's all-boundless sphere,
> To find the matchless maid a peer."

The offended mother was deaf to the repentance of Paris, and prolonged her sojourn at the Rocks until the spring; during which time she taught herself, in the enjoyment of reading and reflection, to do without the world, and also occupied her leisure in nursing her fortune for her children, and in embellishing her residence.

"I have had a number of small trees planted," she wrote in one of her letters, "and a labyrinth which no one can find their way out of, unless they possess the clue of Ariadne. I have also bought several pieces of land, to which I have said as usual, *I shall make you into parks*, and I have managed to extend my gardens and walks without laying out too much money."

Upon her return to Paris, after the short campaign of Louis XIV. in Franche-Comté, Madame de Sévigné found the King making a scandalous display both at Compiègne and at Paris. Without respect for the young Queen, he scarcely concealed his amours with

Digitized by Google

Mademoiselle de la Vallière, Madame de Monaco, and Madame de Montespan; legitimatizing by public acts the children born to him by his favourites, audaciously forcing the Parliament to register the title of Duchess which he conferred upon one, carrying off another from her husband, and ridding himself of the murmurs of M. de Montespan by banishing him from the capital. But the King's right divine had become a dogma so encrusted with the servility of courtiers, that even his defiance of laws, manners, religion, and marriage, appeared royal, and the court adored and submitted while it blushed.

Although Madame de Sévigné was the personification of two Italian lines of Ménage:—

> "Donna bella, gentil, cortese e saggia,
> Di castità, di fede e d'amor tempio;"

that is to say, "a woman of perfect beauty, amiability and virtue, whose soul was the sanctuary of chastity, faith, and pure love," the corruption of example proceeded from such a high source, and vice was so confounded with majesty, that though her letters demonstrate her own purity, she does not appear sufficiently shocked by the royal proceedings. During these long years of public depravity, she continued to follow her daughter most anxiously through all the court festivities, and by her influence summoned around her a small circle of men and women whose strict propriety of conduct was an exception to the time, and who formed a rampart against the universal licence of mind

Digitized by Google

and manners. Her most intimate friends at this epoch were Madame de Scudéry, aunt of Mademoiselle de Scudéry, and, like Madame de Sévigné, a widow at thirty years of age; she had married an old man, whom she had loved notwithstanding the disparity of years, and, following the example of her friend, had refused to form new ties; Madame de la Fayette, whose attachment for the Duke de la Rochefoucauld, like a sort of tacit imputation, kept her at a distance from court; Madame de Guénégaud, a relative and neighbour of the Arnaulds, at the château of Fresnes, near Livry; and lastly, the Arnaulds themselves, the faithful friends of Fouquet, and the patrons of Pascal.

She passed the summer of 1667 in the pure and healthy atmosphere of Fresnes.

"I must tell you how I am situated," she wrote to M. de Pomponne, a member of the Arnauld family, and at that time ambassador in Sweden; "M. d'Andilly is on my left hand, that is to say, on the side next my heart; on my right is Madame de la Fayette; before me Madame de Guénégaud, who is amusing herself with trifling topics; a little further off Madame de Motteville (authoress of the "Mémoires"), in a profound reverie; our uncle de Cessac, whom I fear because I do not thoroughly know him; Madame de Caderousse; her unmarried sister, a new flower that you are not yet acquainted with; and, to crown all, Mademoiselle de Sévigné: they run in and out of the study like a swarm of bees; I am certain you would be as much pleased with their society as I am."

Digitized by Google

The various portraits of this family group united the past century with the present. D'Andilly, the head of the family of Arnauld, almost eighty years of age, had seen Richelieu and Mazarin, and witnessed the storms and changes of the preceding reigns. The memoirs which he wrote in his green old age have afforded us the materials for our own history.

She wrote from Livry on the 29th of April: "I have had a delightful journey: I set out yesterday, early in the morning, from Paris; I dined at Pomponne, where I found our good friend Arnauld expecting me; I would not for the world have lost this opportunity of bidding him farewell. I found him in a state of increased sanctity that was quite marvellous; the nearer he approaches death the more purified he becomes. He lectured me very seriously; and, carried away by zeal and friendship, told me that I must be mad not to seek after conversion; that I was an amiable pagan; that I made you my heart's idol; that this sort of idolatry was as dangerous as any other, although it appeared less criminal in my eyes; and lastly, that I should turn my thoughts to myself and my own condition: he said all this so forcibly that I could not find a word in reply, and at length, after a very agreeable though very serious conversation of six hours, I quitted him and came here, where I was greeted by all the triumph of the month of May; the nightingale, the cuckoo, and the linnet have opened the spring in the forest. I have strolled about in solitude all the evening. My thoughts have been melancholy; but I

Digitized by Google

will not dwell on this subject. I have devoted a portion of my time after dinner to writing to you in the garden, and I am quite bewildered by the song of three or four nightingales immediately over my head. This evening I return to Paris to make up a packet and send it to you."

Madame de la Fayette, who possessed an erudite knowledge of classical languages, and commented upon Virgil and Horace, wrote at the same time her first French romances, palpitating with the emanations of a heart which reposes after having experienced the passion of love; and while thus occupied she was filled with regret for the absence of her friend, the Duke de la Rochefoucauld, who, despite his infirmities, had volunteered his services at the siege of Lille. Madame de Motteville, the confidential friend of Anne of Austria, and a great annoyance to the King, whose vices she too openly blamed, retired into privacy after the death of the Queen-Mother, and silently wrote her memoirs with the authority of one who had been an eye-witness of all she described, but with the discretion of a *confidante*, knowing when to be silent.

Madame de Guénégaud possessed a talent for painting which rivalled that of the best masters of her time; her pictures, placed beside those of Poussin, decorated the walls of the chapel and galleries of the Château de Fresnes. The conversations of the circle touched upon all subjects, from the conquests of the King in Flanders to those masterpieces of composition, the "Misanthrope," the Cid," and the "Andromaque,"

Digitized by Google

produced by Molière, Corneille, and Racine: the judges were worthy of the flights of genius on which they sat in judgment.

The Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, the building of Versailles, and the *fêtes* given there by the King in honour of Madame de Montespan,—who, though still concealed in twilight, was already queen of his heart,—recalled Madame de Sévigné and her daughter to Paris. They appeared at these festivities of 1688, the description of which transports the imagination to the fancied enjoyments of fairy-land. Mademoiselle de Sévigné occupied a place at the King's table, and in the midst of three hundred fair rivals, equally eager to attract a single glance of royalty, she eclipsed all competitors. The King was apparently dazzled; the courtiers, divining the preference of their master, overflowed with admiration of the new idol; the Duke de la Feuillade, the King's favourite and the object of Madame de Montespan's enmity, endeavoured to foment the inclination which he believed he had discovered in his master's heart for Mademoiselle de Sévigné. The rumour circulated that she had made a conquest of the King, and the manners of the age were so accommodating that no one anticipated the slightest resistance on her part. Bussy, the relative and friend of the mother, and the natural protector of her daughter, a gentleman proud of his birth and distinguished position, loudly congratulated himself in his letters upon the dishonourable preference shown to his young cousin. He was mistaken: beneath a feigned attention to

Digitized by Google

Mademoiselle de Sévigné, the King concealed his true passion for Madame de Montespan. The deception had a fortunate influence upon the prospects of Madame de Sévigné's son.

This young man, endowed with all his father's courage and his mother's accomplishments, occupied in Madame de Sévigné's heart only the small portion unclaimed by her daughter. Great passions must be concentrated: the mother loved her son, but with the carelessness of a heart already too full of another absorbing sentiment. The Baron de Sévigné, who was of a light, thoughtless temperament, endured without jealousy the coldness of his mother's affection, and voluntarily occupied a secondary place in her regard: whether it was that he loved his mother even in her injustice, or whether the habit, so early acquired, of feeling himself a secondary object of affection in the family; whether, as is most probable, he was governed by that admiration for his sister which had been enthusiastically inculcated upon him from the cradle by all Madame de Sévigné's intimate friends,—it is certain that he complacently accommodated himself to the second position. He was more of the courtier than of the son or brother, and rather an object of amusement and interest to his surviving parent than the possessor of her passionate love. Nevertheless she carefully provided for his military career. The sound literary education which had been bestowed by such a superior mother placed him above the ordinary youth of his own age. He had attained his twentieth year, and was waiting for an opportunity of

Digitized by Google

attracting the notice of the King. This opportunity soon presented itself.

The Turks had been engaged for four-and-twenty years in the siege of Candia, the capital of Crete, which was defended by the Venetians.

The old alliance which had been entered into by France and Turkey to counterbalance the power of the house of Austria, prevented Louis XIV. from sending succour to the Venetians; while, on the other hand, the religious animosity which Christians entertained against the followers of Mohammed, made his Most Christian Majesty blush at leaving the last stronghold of Christianity in the Mediterranean, to succumb without lifting an arm in defence of the Cross, about to be cast down almost in his presence. He sought to reconcile his deference for the Pope with his political expediency, and could only effect this by a subterfuge alike unworthy of the legislator and the Christian; but the embarrassment of his conscience induced him to adopt it. At the same time that he avowed amity to the Turks, he authorized his favourite, the Duke de la Feuillade, to raise a corps of gentlemen volunteers, and lead them to battle against the Ottoman, under the single standard of the Cross. The nobility of France rushed impetuously to join this expedition of disavowed yet authorized adventurers.

The D'Aubussons, relatives of the hero of Rhodes, the Langerons, the Beauvaus, the Fénelons, the Crequis, the La Rochejacqueleins, the Xaintrailles, the Saint-Pauls, the Grammonts, the Château-Thierrys, the

Digitized by Google

Chamborants,—all enrolled themselves in this new crusade. Turenne, a friend and admirer of Madame de Sévigné, advised her son to commence his military career in a campaign whose religion and distance would add an additional halo to the illusion always accompanying enterprises in the East. The Duke de la Rochefoucauld gave Madame de Sévigné the same counsel. The young Count de Saint-Paul, the son of the beautiful and fascinating Duchess de Longueville, and whose father was reputed to be the Duke de la Rochefoucauld, raised a squadron of a hundred and fifty young cavaliers, all eager for action and renown. The Baron de Sévigné departed with the Count de Saint-Paul. The French displayed a valour which did honour to their nation; but conducted themselves also with a degree of insubordination and impetuosity which lost the town. They nearly all perished in sorties against the Turkish army. The Venetians reproached them with rashness, and they in turn reproached the Venetians with an excess of prudence. Decimated by the sabres of the Ottomans, they abandoned on the shores of Candia the dead bodies of their leaders: the survivors re-embarked before the place fell, and left Crete to deplore the fatal succour which they had brought, and which their unsteadiness had converted into ruin.

The departure of her son for an expedition so suddenly planned and so untowardly terminated, cost Madame de Sévigné some tears; but they were quickly dried by a smile from her daughter: the depths of her heart could feel no want while this beloved child was

Digitized by Google

still with her; even her regrets take an accent of unconcern when she writes to her friends respecting the absence of her son. "I believe you are ignorant," she says, "of my son's departure for Candia with the Duke de la Feuillade and the Count de Saint-Paul. This phantasy has taken unconquerable possession of his mind; he spoke of it to the Cardinal de Retz, to M. de Turenne, M. de la Rochefoucauld. You see what great people have been his counsellors! I have wept bitterly; I am deeply afflicted, and shall not know a moment's repose during this voyage: I see all its perils. I am ready to expire with apprehension; but I have had no control in the matter: on such occasions the voice of a mother carries little weight."

When we compare this slight mention of her son's departure for a campaign in which the heroic representative of the Sévignés was about to encounter sword, fire, water, and other many chances against his ever returning, with the bursts of tears, anxiety, and despair which emanated from the same woman whenever her daughter undertook the smallest excursion at home on a rainy day,—we can easily estimate the affection entertained by the mother for this daughter, compared with that she felt towards her son. The son however merited more from such a parent: upon his departure for Crete he gave with his own hand to his mother a blank paper containing only his signature, as a full consent to the increased fortune it was in his power to bestow upon his sister in furtherance of any matrimonial alliance which might take place during his absence.

Digitized by Google

The desired yet dreaded hour which was to separate mother and daughter at length arrived. The Count de Grignan, one of the King's Lieutenants-general in Languedoc, a provincial nobleman of high descent and reputation, about forty years of age, already twice widowed, possessed of an understanding more solid than enlarged, a countenance heavy rather than pleasing, and a disposition more ambitious than attractive,—on the 29th of January, 1669, married Mademoiselle de Sévigné. The mother, in selecting M. de Grignan, in preference to a younger man whose heart had not already borne the impress of two unions and been shadowed with the grief of two losses, could have had only one aim, that of retaining her daughter in Paris. She flattered herself that M. de Grignan, a favourite of the King in high estimation, would quit his residence in Languedoc and accept a place at court which had been long promised to him.

Mademoiselle de Sévigné consented, rather from obedience and the weariness of waiting, than from any decided inclination on her own part.

Her natural lukewarmness required no love as an accompaniment to marriage. Her mother had satiated her with adoration, and her union was exclusively one of reason and calculation.

We can easily see through the diplomacy of natural instinct with which Madame de Sévigné endeavoured to smooth away in her letters to her friends all the inconsistencies of this alliance :—

"I must inform you that the prettiest girl in France

Digitized by Google

has married, not the handsomest, but one of the most upright men in the kingdom. His former wives have died in order to leave a place for my daughter, and destiny in a moment of unusual kindness has also taken away his father and his son; so that, possessing greater riches than he ever did before, and uniting by birth, connexion, and excellent qualities all we could desire, we made no hesitating terms as it is usually the custom to do; and we feel ourselves much indebted to the two families which have passed away before us. The world appears satisfied, which is much. . . . He has fortune, rank, office, esteem, and consideration in society; what more should we require? I think we have come well out of the scrape."

We perceive by these jesting and almost heartless allusions to M. de Grignan's double widowhood, and to the fortunate decease of both his father and only son, that her joy at finding a husband for her daughter, suited to her wishes, carried her almost beyond decency of expression. We discover more and more, in the perusual of her correspondence, that the wit of her nature predominated over its sentiment, and that her affections, with the exception of that which she felt for her daughter, had no real depth of character.

The first months of Madame de Grignan's married life realized her mother's hopes of not being separated from her darling; they were passed in the sweet retirement of Livry, which recalled to Madame de Sévigné the happiest days of her youth, while it still afforded a shelter to the most felicitous period of her

Digitized by Google

maturity. All that she wrote of Livry during and after this sojourn breathes the peace which expanded beneath the shade of its woods. A solitary cause of annoyance tempered this enjoyment: the Count de Grignan's youngest brother was thrown from a restive horse in the presence of the young Countess, who, being *enceinte*, the shock caused her to faint, and she was severely hurt by the fall. This proved an unfortunate accident, for the evidence of emotion, so natural upon witnessing the accident of a brother-in-law to whom she was attached, scandal interpreted as a proof of criminal preference for the handsomest, youngest, and most amiable of the Grignans. The world circulated these reports, poets perpetuated them in their epigrams, and the ladies of the court, jealous of the beauty and virtue of one of their own *coterie*, conveyed them to the ears of the King.

Madame de Sévigné, wounded where she was most vulnerable—in her daughter's good name—complained to the Duke de la Rochefoucauld and the Prince de Condé, who from their high position had influence enough to hush the voice of calumny; but the scar on Madame de Sévigné's heart remained indelible, and she cherished an undying resentment against those who had propagated the injurious rumour: this indignation, which was produced by her love, was unappeasable.

"Yesterday I went to visit Madame de la Fayette," she wrote to her daughter, "where I met Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld. The conversation related entirely to

Digitized by Google

you,—the just reason that I had to feel myself deeply wounded, and the propriety of speaking to *Mellusine* (Madame de Marans). I can assure you she will be well repaid; D'Hacqueville will give you an account of the whole matter. . . . The affair of Mellusine is in the hands of Langlade, after having passed through those of Messieurs de la Rochefoucauld and D'Hacqueville. I promise you she has been well rebuked, and is thoroughly despised by those who have the honour of knowing her."

A more real misfortune threatened Madame de Sévigné. After completely sacrificing so many desirable points for the sole object of retaining her son-in-law at Paris, he failed in his solicitations for an office at court, and was nominated Lieutenant-General to the King or Vice-Governor of Provence. This post compelled M. de Grignan to reside at the seat of his administration; and Madame de Sévigné with much difficulty induced him to leave his wife behind for her confinement. Madame de Grignan gave birth to a daughter, who was called Mademoiselle d'Adhémar, and who bore the promise of all her mother's beauty and her grandmother's talent; but the cruel ambition of her family condemned her to a convent in the flower of her loveliness. We discover later that Madame de Sévigné had no power to preserve the eldest daughter from the cloister, but she saved Pauline, who became afterwards Madame de Simiane, from a similar fate. Upon examination we find her using every effort and persuasion to avert this doom.

Digitized by Google

"I am filled with pity for the fate of your little girl [Marie Blanche, Mademoiselle d'Adhémar], destined to pass her life in a convent, where she will be lost to you completely. As a preparative, you of course dare not allow her to be removed for any interval of amusement, lest it should unfit her for such a vocation. Truly the child ought to possess a sad and downcast spirit who is to be thus buried alive. . . . I have replied to my dear little Adhémar (Marie Blanche) with sincere affection, and told her that she may be happy if she is contented: the poor child! This is undoubtedly true; but you understand me well."

Some years afterwards, on the subject of the second daughter, Pauline, she wrote thus:—

"Love, love Pauline! give yourself up to this enjoyment, and do not submit to voluntary martyrdom by separation from this little creature. What do you fear? You do not deprive yourself of the power of placing her in a convent some years hence, should you then judge such a step necessary. Indulge a little in maternal love, which ought indeed to be strong where it is the instinct of the heart, and claimed by such a sweet candidate. In imagination I behold our little one here before me; she will resemble you despite the stamp of the workman, who has left her nose truly a strange affair; but that will alter for the better, and I prophesy that Pauline will be beautiful. . . .

"I have heard of the reception which M. de Grignan met with in Provence. I recommend Pauline to him, and implore him to preserve her in defiance of your

Digitized by Google

philosophy. Do not deprive yourselves of this charming source of enjoyment. Alas! have we then so many pleasures to choose from? When one that is innocent and natural is placed in our possession, I cannot think we are called upon to perpetrate such an act of cruelty towards ourselves as voluntarily to part with it. I still sing the same tune over again—Love, love Pauline! love her for all her excellent graces. . . . But let us speak of Pauline, that amiable, that beautiful little being! I am surprised that she has not become stupid and silly in the convent. Ah! you have done well in withdrawing her from it. Cherish her, my daughter; do not deprive yourself of this happiness; Providence will take care of her. I counsel you to give your love for her full scope, even after you have married her in Béarn. Let me know if you intend to part with Pauline: she is a little prodigy; her wit will be her dowry. I should, if I were you, keep her always with me, and preserve her from her sister's fate [in a convent]; and lastly, as she is so extraordinary herself, I should treat her in an extraordinary manner. . . . You will never find this child an embarrassment; on the contrary, she will be of the greatest assistance to you; in fine, she affords me the highest enjoyment; therefore do not, I pray you, impose on me the martyrdom of depriving me of this consolation."

We have thought this digression necessary, in order to show how Madame de Sévigné protested against the barbarous custom of sacrificing daughters to the fortunes of sons. We shall now resume our recital from the

Digitized by Google

first separation of Madame de Sévigné and Madame de Grignan. Madame de Sévigné's distress, as the moment approached which was to witness her daughter's departure to join her husband, demonstrated itself upon the day following the birth of her daughter's infant. Grief rendered her eloquent; her letters to M. de Grignan no longer contain conversation and anecdote; they consist of pleadings and supplications. One by one she disputes with him weeks, days, hours—every pretext gives a reason for postponing the dreaded departure: she feels that her soul is about to be torn from her; she experiences agony at the thought of such a separation. Her letters alternately burn, palpitate, tremble, hope, and despair; their very puerility becomes pathetic; like one in the act of drowning, she catches at everything, even at the rain which falls and at the wind which blows.

"I assure you it is the excessive and unusual severity of the weather which induces me to oppose her departure for a few days longer. I do not expect she will entirely escape the fatigue, cold, and mud of the journey; but I do not wish her to be drowned. This reason, though an excellent one, would not be sufficient to retain her, but for the expectation of a companion who is to accompany her, and who is engaged to marry her cousin, Mademoiselle d'Harcourt; the ceremony is to be performed at the Louvre; M. de Lyonne is to be the proctor; the King has spoken to him. . . . It would seem so strange for her to go alone, and it will be so much better for her to have the society of her

Digitized by Google

brother-in-law, that I shall use all my endeavours to carry out this plan. In the meantime the weather may improve. I must further tell you that her being with me at present affords me no enjoyment. I know that she must leave me; and our only occupations are those of duty and business. We go into no society, and take no pleasure; we are in an unceasing state of anxiety; we talk only of roads, rain, and the tragical adventures of those who encounter such hazards. In a word, though I love her, as you know, our present condition is so distressing and wearisome that for several days we have ceased to enjoy ourselves. Many thanks for the sympathy you bestow on me; you can understand better than any other what my present sufferings are, and what they are likely to be!"

The following day a fresh obstacle was discovered:— "The rain still continues so heavy that to encounter it would be madness. All the rivers have overflowed their banks, the high roads are inundated, and the ruts concealed; travellers would in all probability be carried away at the fords. Things are in such a state that Madame de Rochefort, who is at her country residence, and is most anxious to return to Paris, where her husband desires her presence and her mother expects her with inconceivable impatience, cannot venture upon the road, because there is no safety in doing so. What a terrible winter this is! there has not been a moment's frost, and it rains incessantly with the violence of a tempest; not a single boat can pass under the bridges; the arches of the Pont-Neuf are almost buried

Digitized by Google

in water. Such a state of the weather is truly unprecedented."

At length the day arrived; the parting was consummated: she must seek support in her own heart alone during these terrible moments; the depth of her grief immediately before and after the separation was known only to herself. Her daughter's carriage had scarcely reached the barriers of Paris, when the mother was seated at her desk, and hoping at least to rejoin her daughter in thought. We can perceive that she stifled her sobs in order not to distress the being she loved. This first letter after the separation betrays all the disorder of a soul in which grief, as in a dismantled chamber, has not yet arranged the scattered traces of a removal.

"Ah! my sorrow would be weak indeed if it were possible for me to depict it, therefore I shall not try. I seek everywhere for my daughter, but I no longer find her, and each step she advances bears her further from me. . . . Still weeping and suffering the pangs of death, I went to the chapel of Sainte Marie. I felt as though my heart and soul had been torn from me; in truth, it is a cruel separation. I entreated only to be left alone; they conducted me to the chamber of Madame de Houssuit, and lighted a fire for me. Agnes gazed at me without speaking; this was our contract. I passed five hours there, and sobbed incessantly during the whole time; my thoughts seemed to kill me. I wrote to M. de Grignan, in what tone you can judge; afterwards I went to the house of Madame de la

Digitized by Google

Fayette, who added to my grief by the interest she evinced. She was alone, ill, and afflicted by the death of a sister. She was all that I could wish. M. de la Rochefoucauld entered; they spoke only of you and my distress. . . . The hours of night passed sadly, and the light of morning has brought no peace to my spirit. After dinner I passed my time with Madame de la Troche, and at the Arsenal. In the evening, I received your letter, and this again plunged me back into the intensity of my first sorrow."

Everything that reminded the mother of her daughter served only to feed and renew her grief. A month after, the house, the staircase, the room where the separation took place, reopened all her wounds. At that date she wrote to her daughter: "believe me, my dear child, you are ever in my thoughts, and every day I feel more deeply the truth of what you once said to me, that we ought not to suffer our minds to dwell perpetually upon certain subjects: if we cannot throw off the burden, we shall be for ever in tears. Such is my fate. There is not a spot in this house which does not wound my heart. The whole of your chamber is death to me. I have had a screen placed in the centre, to intercept the view; the window on the staircase, from whence I beheld you enter d'Hacqueville's carriage, and called you back to me, makes me shudder at myself, when I remember the inclination of that moment to throw myself out of it, for sometimes I am almost insane. The cabinet where I embraced you without knowing what I did; the church of the

Digitized by Google

Capuchins, where I attended mass; the tears which, falling from my eyes, watered the ground; Sainte Marie; Madame de la Fayette; my return to this house, your apartment, the night, the morrow, your first letter, those which followed it, the succession of each day, every interview with those who entered into my feelings, poor d'Hacqueville above all—I shall never forget the commiseration he evinced towards me. All these reflections incessantly remind me of the past, but I must subdue them all. How carefully we should refrain from giving the rein to our thoughts, and to the emotions of our hearts! I will endeavour to occupy myself in speculating upon your present mode of life, which will amuse without separating my mind from the object of its love. I shall still dream of you, and anxiously expect your letters. When one reaches me, I shall look forward to the next; I am expecting one at the present moment, and shall resume my own letter when I have heard from you. Dearest, I tire you; to-day I have allowed myself to write this letter in advance: my heart needed it, but it shall not become a habit."

This vivid recollection of an absent being never faded, but followed her daughter through the whole journey. She sometimes feared she might become importunate, and often endeavoured to smile through her tears; the slightest evidence of her child's affection intoxicated her—drew from her exclamations of delight, or a fond and caressing reply, in which she sought forgiveness for the excess of her love from her

Digitized by Google

whom she wearied with such overflowing affection. "You well know, my beautiful girl, that from the way in which you wrote, your letter would draw forth my tears. Join to my tenderness and natural affection for you the little addition of knowing that you return my love, and judge of the excess of my feelings! Wicked child! why do you at times hide this precious treasure from my view? You are afraid that I shall die with joy. You should know, on the contrary, that I am more likely to be killed by grief. I call upon your friend D'Hacqueville to bear witness to the state in which he has sometimes found me. . . . But let us quit these sad recollections, while I abandon myself to the joy of that without which life would be barren and miserable. These are not merely words, they are solemn truths. Madame de Guénégaud has spoken to me of the interest she takes in you for my sake. I beg of you to prize such sentiments, but there shall be no more tears; they are not as beneficial to you as to me. At present I am somewhat reasonable, and able to control myself; occasionally for four or five hours I resemble others, but the slightest occurrence destroys my tranquillity,—a recollection, a word, a place, a half-developed thought; above all, your letters,—even my own while writing them; the mention of your name by another; these are the rocks upon which my fortitude is wrecked, and which I am perpetually encountering. I often see Madame de Villars, and feel much pleasure at our interviews, as she enters into my feelings. Madame de la Fayette is also acquainted with the tenderness I

Digitized by Google

entertain for you; she was deeply touched by that which you evince towards me. I have seen poor Madame Amyot; she wept to such a degree that I seemed in her to behold myself. Alas! what does not awake my recollection? I cherish the most trifling reminiscences."

At the date of this separation began Madame de Sévigné's true work—the development of her life in her letters to her daughter. The correspondence of her mind gave place to that of her heart. Up to this period she had possessed only the power of charming; the genius of tenderness burst forth with her tears; she lived only for the sake of writing to her daughter; and in order that the agreeable and incessant employment of her letters, which afforded the nourishment daily required by her heart, might not lead her pen into a fatiguing repetition of maternal love, she sought to blend with her domestic details, her conversations, her opinions, the books she read, the court, the city, the army, even the scandal of the day,—all that could afford her an excuse for writing. She compelled herself to be interesting and entertaining, that she might obtain pardon for demanding so much sympathy. At this date also commences the epistolary record of the reign of Louis XIV. A woman dwelling concealed in the Rue des Tournelles, or in her retirement of "the Rocks," writes unconsciously with the pen of a fashionable secretary, while Saint-Simon holds that of a court Tacitus in the antechamber of the Dauphin. Singular destiny of a reign, fortunate in all points, to have been

Digitized by Google

recorded more minutely in private communications than in its public annals; first by a mother endeavouring to amuse her daughter, and afterwards by a courtier seeking to stigmatize his rivals. Voltaire, in his 'History of the Age of Louis XIV.,' is less circumstantial than either of these echoes. We may affirm that the propitious circumstance of possessing two such involuntary historians as an impassioned mother like Madame de Sévigné, and a violent satirist like Saint-Simon, has contributed much to the fame and interest of this illustrious epoch. The private correspondence of Madame de Sévigné became at once a chronicle of France, surpassing all others in its sketches, its varied impressions, its anecdotes, its portraits, its private information, its significant phrases, its reserves and revelations, its approbation and censure. It also depicts with the vivid pencil of reality, the events, the men, the women, the glories, the disgraces and the reverses of the age; each page contains an ineffaceable impression of the period, executed by the hand of a woman. It is a family picture of the seventeenth century, drawn forth from the dust of the Château de Grignan, and bestowed upon posterity to the latest generation.

We can neither reduce, analyze, nor engrave such a picture: we must follow it feature by feature through the space of two thousand letters, in which the painter is so closely mingled with the design, that in studying the century we are compelled to connect ourselves with the writer. It would be impossible to erase Madame de Sévigné from the picture without tearing the canvas

Digitized by Google

and destroying its most natural expression and its most vivid colouring.

The absence of Madame de Grignan produced only a physical separation between Madame de Sévigné and her daughter; in mind they never were more closely united. Henceforth her thoughts were solely occupied with the interests of M. and Madame de Grignan; she became more ambitious than nature had created her; she bestowed her attention upon everything likely to increase or decrease her son-in-law's advancement at court; she made herself perpetual ambassadress from the new governor of Provence to those men upon whom his fortune and office depended; and while she wrote excellent political advice to M. de Grignan, counselling him how to deal with parties, interests, and pretensions at Aix and at Marseilles, she mingled more than ever with the influential circles of Paris, in order to establish the value of his services: and assiduously revived all the friendships of her youth that they might be continued in reversion to her daughter. Up to this period she had carelessly enjoyed the privilege of being loved; but now she exerted herself to please. Her success was not a matter of uncertainty; such attractions as she possessed commanded it: her unimpaired beauty, her intellectual resources, her wit, more variable and fascinating than ever, were the chief weapons of her diplomacy; she neglected nothing that could render her name agreeable to the King and his favourites. Her son, who had returned from the unfortunate campaign of Candia, wanted interest to

Digitized by Google

advance him in the army. At this period the court began to imbibe the Spanish devotion which Anne of Austria had transmitted with the blood of Philip II. to her son. Madame de Sévigné involuntarily followed the general current, which led at the same time to royal favour and to heaven. Her disposition received the bent, her letters took the accent; and her thoughts, beneath their superficial gaiety, contracted a certain unction of easy piety. It is easy to imagine that the grief of living apart from the sole object of her love would naturally lead her to the source of supernatural consolation; it is, however, due to her to state that the devotion, which had become a sort of court costume, never in her degenerated into a base adulation of those who held the reins of the King's conscience. She continued, though in secret, faithful to her first friendships, and constant in her veneration for the Arnaulds —the Puritans and Independents of Catholicism. Her sighs and affectionate solicitude for the persecuted recluses of Port-Royal break forth in all her letters with an accent of holy indignation which absolves her devotion from servility. She constantly read the 'Essays' of Nicole. That stoical philosopher, who inculcated separation from all earthly pursuits, persuaded her to adopt his opinions.

"I am perusing this moral system of Nicole, and find it delightful. It has not yet taught me any lesson against rain, but I expect it will do so, for it contains everything; and conformity to the will of God would suffice, did I not desire a more specific remedy. The

Digitized by Google

work is truly admirable. No one has yet written like these men; for I consider that Pascal has only half achieved the truly beautiful. All people love so to discuss themselves and their own feelings, that even where the argument takes an unfavourable turn, the charm still continues. I have pardoned the *inflation* of heart for the sake of the rest: I contend there is no other word which so truly conveys the emptiness of pride and vanity,—I challenge you to find one; and in the meantime I shall pursue my book with much pleasure. . . . I read M. Nicole with a delight that elevates my mind; I am most of all charmed by the third treatise, on the means of preserving peace amongst men: read it, I pray, with attention. Every one must find there a knowledge of himself,—the philosopher, the Jansenist, the Molinist, and in fact all the world. This is what may be called searching the depths of the heart with a lantern, which it actually does. It reveals to us what we daily feel, and have not the courage to declare or the sincerity to avow; in a word, I have never perused such writing as that which emanates from the pens of these gentlemen." * * * "You know that I am always somewhat enthusiastic in my reading. Those with whom I converse are anxious that I should peruse good and profitable books: the one which at present engages my attention is this. 'Essay on Morals,' by Nicole; it contains a treatise upon the method of preserving peace upon earth, with which I am ravished. I have never seen anything so useful, nor so full of mind and

Digitized by Google

information: if you have not read it, do so without delay; if you should have read it, read it again with renewed attention. I believe all the world will find themselves depicted here: for myself, I am persuaded it has looked into my thoughts; I hope to profit by it, and shall endeavour to do so. You know I cannot bear to hear aged people say, I am too old to improve; I would rather pardon the youthful for saying, I am too young. Youth is so charming, that we should be compelled to adore it if the soul and the mind were as unblemished as the form; but when we are no longer young, we must endeavour to perfect ourselves, and seek to gain by our good qualities all that we lose in external attraction. It is a long time since I have made these reflections, and for this reason I wish daily to exercise my intellect, my soul, my heart, and my sentiments; this is what I am now full of, and what I fill this letter with, having little to say on other topics. . . . These are the turns which my imagination every moment takes: it always seems to me that all I love, all that is dear to me, is about to leave me; and this so afflicts my heart, that were the feeling as lasting as it is vivid, I could not bear up against it. This calls for submission to the dispensations and will of God. Is not M. Nicole admirable on this theme? I am charmed; I have seen nothing like it before; in truth, it is a perfection somewhat beyond human nature, and I am less capable than many of attaining the indifference he wishes us to feel for the applause and esteem of the world. But though I am feeble in execution, it is

Digitized by Google

nevertheless a pleasure to meditate with him, and to make reflections upon the joy, vanity, and sorrow which we experience from such a vapour; and it is not impossible that we may derive some benefit by following the course of true and forcible argument. In a word, the possession of such a faithful mirror of the weakness of our hearts is always a treasure that we can turn to profit. M. d'Andilly is as much delighted with this beautiful book as we are. . . . It is quite impossible for M. Nicole's work to produce as good an effect upon me as it has upon M. de Grignan; I have ties upon all sides, but above all one which is in the marrow of my bones, and how can M. Nicole deal with that? Heaven knows I admire him profoundly; but I am a long way from the happy state of indifference which he wishes us to attain."

To her daughter she accused herself of appreciating the sublimity of this moral code without possessing the power to sever her heart from the affection which filled it. "Alas! my words are good enough. I arrange them like those who talk well, but I am vanquished by the tenderness of my feelings; for instance, imagination did not exaggerate the grief I should experience at my separation from you: I feel it, as I foresaw I should. I have always been convinced that nothing could fill your place, that your memory would be ever impressed upon my heart, that I should weary of your absence, and night and day think only of you. Yes! in all this I have fulfilled my presentiment. There

Digitized by Google

are several spots I have not courage to look upon; doing so would overwhelm my fortitude, as you used to remark; but I have never been able to apply to myself the proverb which says, *Wear a dress suited to the cold.* I have no dress suited to such cold as this."

She went to seek her consolation in the churches, and her reminiscences at Livry. "My child," she wrote a few days afterwards, "three hours have elapsed since I quitted Paris with the Abbé [de Coulanges], Hélène [her maid], Hébert [her footman], and Marphise [her dog], and with the intention of excluding myself from the world and its noise until Thursday evening. I imagine myself in solitude, and seek to establish a little La Trappe: I wish to meditate and pray. I have resolved to fast often during my stay here, for many reasons, to walk during the time I usually remained in my chamber, and above all to deprive myself of amusement or pastime, from motives of piety; but that which I shall do much better and more incessantly than all this, will be to think of you. My daughter, I have not ceased to do so since my arrival; and being unable to continue the train of my reflections, I have begun writing to you at the end of the little dark walk which you were so fond of, and I am placed upon the mossy seat where I have sometimes seen you reclining; but what spot here is not associated with your image? My heart is distracted with all these thoughts; there is not a single place in the house, the garden, the church, or the surrounding country, where I have not

Digitized by Google

been with you. . . . I still see you: you are ever present with me. I think and think of you again and again; my head and mind are both on the rack; but vainly at every turn do I seek the dear child whom I so passionately love. She is at a distance of two hundred leagues from me. I hold her no longer in my arms. At this sad thought I have no power to restrain my tears. My beloved, this is indeed a terrible indulgence; I cannot fortify myself against such a justifiable and natural tenderness. The state of mind this place has thrown me into is almost incredible. I entreat of you not to talk of my weakness; you ought to respect the tears which flow from a heart so entirely devoted to you. If I had wept for my sins as much as I have wept for you since I have been here, I should be well prepared to enter upon the rejoicings of Easter. I have stayed here during the time I intended, and have passed it in the way I proposed. It is a strange thing to possess so lively an imagination, which presents the past as vividly as though it still existed, while the present glides away in a dream. It is death to have such a heart as mine. I know not how to escape from you. Our house in Paris daily overwhelms me with sorrow, and Livry is the climax of my affliction; as for you, it is only by an effort of memory that you can think of me in return. Provence has none of the power of bringing me before you that these spots possess of presenting you to me. I have found something soothing in the sadness I have endured here,—a wide solitude, an unbroken silence;—a melancholy

Digitized by Google

occupation,—the *Tenebræ** chanted with devotion, a canonical fast, and a tranquil beauty in the gardens, with which you would be charmed,—all this I have found very pleasing, as I have never before resided at Livry during the holy week. Alas! how I have wished for you! Much as you dislike solitude, you would be contented here. But urgent affairs compel my return to Paris."

The King's absence from the capital, the fluctuation of Madame de Sévigné's life in the unoccupied interval, and the necessity of retracing the spots consecrated by her happiest hours of intercourse with her daughter, brought her back to "the Rocks," in the heart of Brittany, during the session of the States of the province, in which her son represented the nobility. While she continued there, all the natural lightness of her character disappeared, and the solitude, for which she seemed so little formed, developed the only source of happiness still remaining to her, the indulgence of recollection and melancholy. The loss of her daughter's society completely altered her disposition; it imbued her with the poetry of tears, opened an inexhaustible source of regret, and led her to discover those delightful sympathies existing between inanimate nature and the living soul, which at a later period have immortalized the genius of Jean Jacques Rousseau, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, and Châteaubriand; and which were profound mysteries to the writers of a court so com-

* A ritual of the Roman Catholic Church, applicable to Passion-week.—TRANSL.

Digitized by Google

pletely devoted to the world as that of Louis XIV. "At length, my daughter, I am once more at these poor Rocks. Can I again look upon these walls, these inscriptions, this little cabinet, these books, this room, without dying of grief? There are many pleasurable recollections, but some are so vivid and so tender that we can scarcely endure them. All those associated with you are of this nature. Cannot you easily imagine the effect they produce upon such a heart as mine? In these woods I sometimes indulge in such sombre reveries that I emerge from them more altered than by an attack of fever. There I can dream uninterruptedly. I find both time and place, and am free to do as I like upon the lawn of my garden. I delight in walking upon it every evening until eight o'clock; my son's absence creates a silence, tranquillity, and solitude which are not to be found elsewhere. I will not tell you who I think of, nor with how deep a tenderness. Where our thoughts can be divined, there is no necessity to utter them. We still read together Tasso, the admirable morality of Nicole, and the Cleopatra of Mademoiselle de Scudéry, to the late hours of night, and I generally sleep over this reading."

"Ah! my child," she continued at another period, "I have just returned from walking in the *Humeur de ma fille*" (a name she had bestowed upon a walk in the woods, where Madame de Grignan had loved to sit and meditate alone during her childhood); "I have come from this wood; truly its glades possess a charm of which I am never weary; there are six you are quite

Digitized by Google

unacquainted with, but those you do know are improved by the growth of the trees; the walks now are dry and beautiful. I dwell there until twilight, and there I find leisure to love you. I thank you, my child, for having preserved some memory of the *patrio nido* (the paternal nest, or native country), and why should it be impossible for me to behold you once more in these beautiful alleys?"

She drained the depths of her soul to find something which might render her letters interesting to her daughter; she touched upon all the daily occurrences of a country life, its domestic employments, its simple recreations; she described her walks, her visits to her neighbours, her parterres, her autumnal evenings by the fireside, her studies, her *badinage* with her son whom she never treated seriously; even her regret for having left her dog Marphise at Paris, and her remorse for adopting and cherishing another four-footed favourite.

"You are surprised at my having a little dog. Thus it happened. From mere want of company, I called to me a small greyhound belonging to a lady who lives at the bottom of this park. Madame de Tarente, knowing this, observed, 'What! do you care for dogs? I will send you one, and the prettiest in the world.' I thanked her, and told her I had formed a resolution never again to indulge in this folly. Here our conversation ended, and I thought no more of the matter. Two days after I beheld a footman entering with a little dog-kennel, ornamented with ribbons, and out of

Digitized by Google

this pretty house came a small dog, perfumed all over, and wonderfully beautiful, with long silky hair and ears, a sweet breath, no larger than a sylph, and white as driven snow. I never felt more surprise or embarrassment; I wished to return it, but they would not hear of such a thing. The lady's-maid who brought it up has nearly died of grief at its loss. Marie has conceived the greatest affection for this little pet. It sleeps in her house, in Beaulieu's chamber, and eats nothing but bread. I do not care for it, but it begins to attach itself to me, and I am afraid I shall be conquered. This is the history which I entreat of you not to communicate to Marphise, for I fear his reproaches. Furthermore, this little beauty is cleanliness itself: his name is Fidèle, an appellation which the lovers of the princess have never been worthy to bear, though their manners are sufficiently fashionable; some day or other I will recount his adventures to you. . . . What you say to me respecting Fidèle is most charming and agreeable; truly my conduct has been that of a perfect coquette. I am ashamed of it, and I endeavour to excuse myself, as you see, for it is certain I aspired to the perfection of never having been attached to more than one dog, in defiance of the maxims of M. de la Rochefoucauld. And now I am embarrassed with regard to Marphise. I know not what to do in this matter, or what reason to assign. I shall insensibly be let into falsehood, unless I detail to him ever circumstance connected with my new engagement. My final resolution is never again to place myself in such a

Digitized by Google

difficult position; it is a grand instance of the wretchedness of humanity. This misfortune has entirely occurred from my being in the vicinity of Vitré."

Her son's follies, amours, and repentances, form the usual text of her confidential communications with her daughter; but he is merely the subject of her humour, which invariably sacrifices him to the smiles of his sister.

"Upon returning from my walk the day before yesterday, I encountered the *frater* at the end of the mall. The moment he perceived me he threw himself upon his knees, feeling himself so guilty for having passed three weeks in singing his matins underground, that he only dared to approach me in this position. I had made a resolute determination of scolding him soundly, but I knew not where to seek for anger, I was so rejoiced to see him. You know how amusing he is; he embraced me a thousand times, and tried to satisfy me by the worst reasons in the world, which I received for good ones. We converse a great deal, we read, we walk, and thus we pass the year, or at least the remainder of it."

She varied her solitude by visiting M. and Madame de Chaulnes; we must repeat some of these inimitable descriptions of country state, which transport us to Brittany in the seventeenth century. In June, 1671, she writes to her daughter:—

"I do not yet know what will be the result of all these expenses; I think I shall run away, to keep myself from being ruined. It is a delightful thing to spend a thousand crowns in dinners and fricassees for

Digitized by Google

the honour of being the country house of entertainment for M. and Madame de Chaulnes, Madame de Rohan, M. de Lavardin, and all Brittany, who, without knowing or caring for me, for the mere pleasure of imitating others, will not fail to come here. We shall see.

"On Monday I dined at M. de Chaulnes', who holds state twice daily, for fear people should not see me. I dare not tell you the compliments and honours they pay me at these entertainments, which are truly ridiculous. Nevertheless, I have not yet slept from home, and I cannot consent to give up my woods and my walks, no matter how they entreat me.

"*August*, 1671.—At length, my dear child, I am in full state, or rather Rochers is full of state. Last Sunday, just as I had sealed my letters, I saw four carriages-and-six enter the courtyard with fifty outriders, many saddle-horses, and several mounted judges. They were M. de Chaulnes, M. de Rohan, M. de Lavardin, Messieurs de Coëtlogon and Locmarie, the Barons de Guais, the Bishops of Rennes and Saint Malo, the Messieurs d'Argouges, and eight or ten more with whom I was unacquainted. I have omitted M. d'Harouïs, but he is not worth mentioning. I received the whole company: they asked and answered many things. After a stroll, with which they seemed much pleased, an excellent and well-appointed collation appeared at one end of the mall, in which Burgundy reigned preeminent and flowed like the waters of Forges: all were persuaded that it was produced by the stroke of an enchanter's wand. M. de Chaulnes entreated me to go

Digitized by Google

at once to Vitré. I went there on Monday evening; M. de Chaulnes entertained me with a supper and the comedy of 'Tartuffe,' by no means badly acted, and a ball, in which the minuet and the jig irresistibly drew forth my tears by vividly bringing you to my remembrance; but I quickly dissipated my emotion. They constantly speak to me of you, and I make no pause in my reply, for you are ever in my thoughts; I really think they must be visible through the body of my petticoat. Yesterday I received all Brittany at my tower of Sévigné. I went again to the play, which was 'Andromaque,' and made me shed more than six tears; that was sufficient for a troop of country actors. You are now, thank Heaven, informed of everything connected with your own delightful country.

"If you ask me how I find myself at the Rocks after so much excitement, I will tell you that I am transported with joy. I intend to remain here for eight days longer at least, no matter how I am tormented to return. I cannot describe the desire I feel for repose: I am in need of sleep and food, for I should die of hunger at these feasts: I feel the necessity of recruiting myself and of indulging in silence, for I have talked to everybody till my lungs are exhausted. In conclusion, my dear child, I have regained my Abbé, my mossy bench, my dog, my avenue, Pilois, my bricklayers,—all that is most agreeable to my present frame of mind, and when I begin to feel tired I can again seek variety."

Upon returning to Paris her letters change subjects,

Digitized by Google

and resume a style of seriousness with the same ease with which they had for a time adopted a tone of gaiety. In the metropolis her topics were the court with its vicissitudes of favour and disgrace, and an account of opinions more or less sound upon the great poets, writers, and sacred orators of the day. The correspondence becomes a sort of controversy between faith and philosophy, in which the mother upholds blind and passive belief, while the daughter advocates an independent and reasonable religion: it contains their mutual discussions upon literary preferences, and their reflections upon the books which they read at the same time at Livry and at Grignan. M. de Sévigné adopted his mother's side of the argument, and jested with his sister in a strain of exquisite humour and good taste combined.

"Ah! poor circumscribed intellect," he writes, "you do not like Homer; the most perfect works appear to you worthy of contempt; you have no feeling for natural beauties; you require tinsel or *petits corps* [in allusion to Descartes, who was Madame de Grignan's chief study]. If you wish to be at peace with me, do not read Virgil; I never could forgive you for abusing him as you would be capable of doing. If, however, you will have construed to you the sixth and ninth books, which latter contains the episode of Nisus and Euryalus, also the eleventh and twelfth, I am sure they will afford you much pleasure. Turnus you will consider worthy of your esteem and friendship, and to speak candidly, knowing you as I do, I should tremble for M. de Grig-

Digitized by Google

nan if such an individual were about to visit Provence; but I, being a good brother, desire this event from the bottom of my heart solely for your advantage; and since it is decreed that your head shall be turned, it had better be in this way than by the *indefectibility of matter and non-conversible negations* (Cartesian doctrines). It is sad to be for ever occupied with trifles and arguments so subtle that it is impossible to understand them. . . . No matter what happens, I assure you I shall ever entertain the same warm remembrance and affection for you, my beautiful little sister."

Madame de Sévigné's favourite authors were—Corneille, La Fontaine, Bourdaloue, Bossuet, Fénelon, Ariosto, Tasso, Petrarch, Montaigne, Boileau, Cervantes, Nicole, Pascal, and Molière; the Koran also formed a portion of her studies: she never discovered or foresaw the greatness of Racine, which was somewhat concealed by the uniform perfection of style in a young poet who was destined soon to eclipse all the objects of her early admiration. Racine, who was in love with La Champmêlé, a celebrated actress and beauty, happened to be the fortunate rival of the Baron de Sévigné, her son, who was also enamoured of the same syren, and lavished upon her his heart and fortune. Madame de Sévigné's prejudice against Racine may be considered a sort of family antipathy. In every other case, her sound judgment only forestalled the opinion of posterity. Her opposition to the Jesuits and her predilection for the Jansenists, did not prevent her from declaring Bossuet and Bourdaloue the masters of the pulpit, nor did

Digitized by Google

it interfere with her warm admiration of their clerical oratory. Her devotion nevertheless, conforming to the other sentiments of her soul, sacrificed itself to her controlling passion for her daughter: her religion was in fact more a studied science than a natural inspiration—a duty of life rather than an impulse of the heart; acquired faith was its basis, piety from innate tender feeling formed no ingredient. Her belief was stronger than her adoration.

"I have just finished classifying my little library, and have accomplished the task in a single morning," she says. "I have brought a quantity of books here, and have arranged them to-day; no one can lay their hand on any particular volume, no matter what its subject may be, without wishing to read it entirely through. The first shelf consists exclusively of devotional works. What a prominent position for the honour of religion! The next shelf is entirely devoted to history; the third to morality; the last to poetry, tales, and memoirs. Romances are excluded with contempt, and have therefore obtained undisputed possession of the small closets. When I re-enter this cabinet, I cannot understand why I ever leave it: it would be worthy of you, my daughter."

Her pen dealt with the profoundest questions of sacred metaphysics with as much ease as it did with the playful motions of her ordinary thoughts; her exquisite reason upheld while it modified the theory of the *grace* and *action* of God in his creatures,—a sort of Christian fatalism, inculcated in the doctrines of her

Digitized by Google

friends at Port Royal. A woman, simply a disciple, corrects while she explains the tenets of the Apostles. "You are then reading St. Paul and St. Augustine? Their works thoroughly establish the will of God; they do not hesitate to assert that God disposes of his creatures: like the potter, some he chooses, some he rejects. They need not plead for justice, for there is no other justice than his will, which is justice itself, and an established law. After all, what does he owe to men? what right can they claim? None. He therefore renders them justice when he leaves them in their original sinful condition, which is the natural inheritance of all, and he shows mercy to the small number of those whom he saves for his Son's sake. Jesus Christ has said this himself: 'I know my sheep; I will lead them to the pasture myself: not one of them shall be lost; I know them, and they know me.' He said to his Apostles, 'I have chosen you; it is not you who have chosen me.' I find many similar passages: I search them all, and when I meet with one apparently contradictory, I say it arises simply from the endeavour to speak in general terms applicable to all understandings; for instance, when it is stated, 'God repented,' and that he was angry, the terms are addressed to men, and are used that men may comprehend them. I hold to this first great truth, which is altogether divine, and represents God like God, the master, author, and sovereign Creator of the universe; and finally, to quote a reflection of your spiritual father, Descartes, a perfect and infinite being.

Digitized by Google

"Such are my humble and insignificant thoughts, which lead me to no absurd conclusions, and do not deprive me of the hope that I shall be one of the number chosen and elected by so many acts of grace, which are the pre-judgments and foundations of my confidence. I have the greatest dislike to enter into all this discussion. Why do you introduce the subject? My pen runs on as if I were beside myself."

She passes from the sublimity of metaphysics to the gayest and most immaterial jesting upon the amours of her son, which she holds up to the somewhat sarcastic derision of his sister. By an hereditary fatality, the same Ninon de Lenclos, who at twenty had stolen the love of Madame de Sévigné's husband, at fifty-four carried off the heart of her son. The bloom of this celebrated courtesan's beauty survived the inroad of years; the reputation of her wit, taste, and philosophy, added to the number of her admirers, completed the seduction of the Baron de Sévigné. Ninon was not only attractive, but she was the fashion, and men prided themselves upon being enslaved by her charms; those of most illustrious talent, and some who even professed the severest principles, did not deem themselves dishonoured in frequenting her assemblies. Madame de Sévigné's complaints to her daughter inform us that Racine and Boileau supped at the expense of her son at Ninon's house, after having in the morning read their verses to the King and Madame de Maintenon. This second seduction in the same family, after a lapse of thirty years, re-opened the wound in

Digitized by Google

Madame de Sévigné's heart. Her feelings revolted against Ninon, and she compelled her son to blush for a passion opposed to nature.

"What a dangerous being this Ninon is," she wrote to her daughter; "if you only knew how she dogmatizes upon religion, you would be filled with horror. Her zeal for the perversion of young men resembles that of a certain M. de Saint-Germain, whom we have sometimes seen at Livry. She says your brother has the simplicity of a dove, that he resembles his mother, that Madame de Grignan has all the spirit of the family, and is not silly enough to copy his docility. Some one present, endeavouring to take your part, sought to change her opinion: she silenced him by saying she knew more about it than he did. What depravity! and for what reason? Simply because, knowing you to be beautiful and clever, she seeks to bestow upon you, in addition, the liberal quality, without which, according to her maxims, no one is perfect! I am deeply wounded by the injury she does my son in this matter; do not say anything to him on the subject. I and Madame de la Fayette are doing all we can to separate him from such a dangerous connexion."

A little later she adds: "I fancy the chapter on your brother has afforded you much amusement. He is now in an interval of repose; notwithstanding which, he daily visits Ninon, but only as a friend. I am going to take him into Brittany, where I hope he will regain health both of mind and body."

Separation, the tender reproaches of his mother,—

Digitized by Google

who was more intimately the *confidante* of his intrigues than the maternal propriety of the present day would permit,—and at length the war, tore De Sévigné from the love of Ninon. Madame de Sévigné carried her son to Brittany, where she sought to banish his regret by the charm of her conversation and the most indulgent kindness.

Madame de Sévigné went afterwards to pass fifteen months in Provence, with Madame de Grignan, and regained all the hearts which her daughter's coldness had alienated.

She wrote to Bussy from thence: "I have been here for eight months, my dear cousin. You see I have had courage to travel all the way from Brittany; I do not repent of it. My daughter is amiable, as you know, and she loves me fondly; M. de Grignan possesses all the qualities which render society agreeable. Their château is very beautiful, and equally magnificent; this house has a grand appearance; they entertain in first-rate style, and a thousand people come to meet us. We have passed the winter here without any other annoyance than the master of the house being attacked by fever, which repeated doses of quinine have had much difficulty in subduing, strong as he is. At length he is better, and has gone to Aix, where they were enchanted to see him again. In addition, my son has again come from Brittany to take the waters here, and the agreeable company, to which his presence is such an addition, has done him more good than anything else. The whole family then are here

Digitized by Google

altogether. There is a young little Grignan whom you are not acquainted with, who fills her place very well; she is sixteen years of age, pretty, and intelligent, and promises to become more so. All these attractions combined are most agreeable, indeed too agreeable, for I find days, months, and years pass by so rapidly that I scarcely know how they escape: time flies, and bears me with it against my will; I seek to retard it in vain; it draws me along in spite of myself, and the thought terrifies me. The younger Grignan, the heir, has passed the winter along with us; he had the fever in the spring, and rejoined his regiment a fortnight since. When we shall revisit Paris is a secret as yet known to Providence alone."

From Provence, Madame de Sévigné returned to Paris, and thence she proceeded to the Rocks. Brittany was agitated at that time by risings of the peasantry, the result of public want.

The terms in which Madame de Sévigné expresses herself upon the punishments inflicted *en masse* upon the unfortunate Bretons, are more than cruel, they are volatile and thoughtless; the air of the court had hardened her heart to the sufferings of those beneath her in rank. This woman, sensitive to the crumpling of a roseleaf in her daughter's destiny, laughs at the gibbets on which the King's troops suspended the bodies of the unfortunate peasants who knelt in supplication before their executioners, and who were ignorant even of the language in which their tyrants addressed them. To put faith in Madame de Sévigné's

Digitized by Google

sensibility, we must tear these leaves from the volumes of her correspondence: the woman who could seek ornaments of style to amuse her daughter, in the spectacle of these horrors, may be a mother, but she ceases to be a female. Let us glide quickly over this stain, which casts a shadow upon her letters, and saddens the heart of the reader.

The good fortune of being re-united to her daughter for a space of five years, interrupted the occupation and labour of her life—writing letters and lamenting over the past. Her son married a young heiress of Brittany, who enticed the Baron de Sévigné from the follies of youth to the attractions of a quiet life, retired in its enjoyments, and almost ascetic in practice. He became one of the most fervent and austere disciples of his mother's friends at Port-Royal. Madame de Sévigné, henceforth alone, passed her time between Paris, Livry, and the Rocks. In these varied scenes she refreshed her sensibilities and the mournful graces of her style.

At this epoch she wrote: "We have had the most beautiful weather in the world here until Christmas-eve. I was at the end of the grand avenue admiring the beauty of the sun, when all of a sudden I beheld a thick black cloud arise, into which the sun plunged, and at the same moment I was surrounded by a frightful fog; I ran home, and I have not since quitted my chamber or the chapel till to-day, when the dove returned with the olive-branch. The earth has resumed its colour, and the sun, again emerging, has induced me

Digitized by Google

to take a walk; for you, who are anxious for my health, my beloved one, can imagine that when the weather is so discouraging I am seated by the fireside, reading and chatting with my son and his wife."

In her solitary mode of life at this period, she lost little of her interest in existence; her soul was of that lukewarm temperature, upon which age bestows tranquillity without stealing from its warmth. The sole passion, or rather the only instinct in which she had ever indulged, was maternal affection, and that in woman increases instead of diminishing with years. The less they live in themselves, the more they live in their children. She did not exhaust her being, but poured it continually into that of another.

Such dispositions are not sensible of a void; for the heart which has never overflowed is always sufficiently full. Friendship satisfies the temperament of these souls. Madame de Sévigné had many friends, with whom she had held intercourse through the charming medium of a pen which discoursed brilliantly upon all subjects. With the exception of her daughter, her seventy years of life were only a long conversation. One man alone from the entire list of her correspondents seems to have warmed her feelings to the true heat of friendship; this man was Corbinelli, and his name is more constantly repeated in her letters than any other. Corbinelli was one of the rare exceptions who seem created by nature to be the benevolent spectators of human events, without taking any part in them beyond that of observation and interest for the actors. These unpre-

Digitized by Google

suming but necessary appendages to society resemble the confidants of the stage, who listen, who are there to fill empty spaces, and to give answers when required; they need the art and judgment, without the passion of those who perform the principal characters, and none of the applause bestowed is directed to them. Corbinelli had nothing of the French vanity which insists on being distinguished; he was satisfied with enjoying himself. Italian by birth, with the indifference of a foreigner, and the learning of a Florentine of the great philosophical and poetical epoch of Leo X.; introduced into France by Cardinal Mazarin, employed by that minister for some years at Rome in negotiations of secondary importance, where his address had unravelled the secret of great political schemes, without his desert being either recognized or rewarded,—Corbinelli remained at Paris, living upon a moderate pension, and desiring only the enjoyment of perfect leisure. For his own gratification he cultivated letters, antiquity, philosophy, history, and the intellectual society of his time. He was an Italian Saint-Evremond,—able to compete with the greatest minds, but shrinking from an encounter with the difficulties which lie in the path of fame, and assuming, as much through idleness as want of ambition, the character of an amateur. He was one of the first to discover Madame de Sévigné's exquisite superiority of Attic grace, and he made her his Beatrice. His admiration and attention, his worship, which sought no return, gained him admittance to her house, where he was regarded as one of the family, and became a

Digitized by Google

necessary appendage. Madame de Sévigné, at first charmed by his wit, afterwards touched by his disinterested attachment, concluded by making him the confidant of her most secret emotions. Every heart that beats warmly beneath its own bosom, seeks to hear itself repeated in that of another. Corbinelli became the echo of Madame de Sévigné's mind, soul, and existence. Either from predilection or complaisance, he participated in her maternal adoration of her daughter. At Paris, Corbinelli visited Madame de Sévigné every day; he sometimes followed her to Livry and the Rocks, and when absent, corresponded with her frequently. The dominion which his friend exercised over him was so gentle that he experienced no feeling of slavery, while he submitted implicitly to the rule of her tastes. Her empire was so absolute, that when Madame de Sévigné became a devotee, Corbinelli adopted the character of a mystic; he followed her, as the satellite accompanies the planet, from the worldly dissipations of her youth even to the foot of the altar and the ascetic self-denial of Port-Royal.

Such was Madame de Sévigné's principal friend. If his name was erased from her letters, the monument would be mutilated; he is enshrined there in the inmost heart, and merits his exalted position. We must not deprive such devotion of its sole glory, the glory of having loved Corbinelli, whose easy philosophy and amiable indifference with regard to himself, immeasurably prolonged his existence, survived his friend, as though he had survived himself, and lived to the

Digitized by Google

extraordinary age of one hundred and four; the man was animated by unusual life through his gentle and amiable feelings.

Madame de Sévigné's emotions were too vivid not to consume her existence; the dominating influence of one feeling grew stronger and stronger in her retirement. The life of her daughter, who in her turn became a mother, disturbed by the ambition and harassed by the extravagance of M. de Grignan, reflected itself painfully in her own. She enjoyed from time to time some short intervals of happiness; but they evaporated in melancholy reflections and tears, as often as she revisited the localities which called up and filled her mind with the image of her daughter.

"I am here, my daughter," she wrote in a letter from La Silleraie during her latter years; "here in a spot where you once accompanied me; but it is no longer recognizable; there is not one stone left upon another as they were at that time."

And upon returning to the Rocks: "I have found the woods," she said, "looking beautiful, but strangely sad; all the trees which you remember so small have become large and tall, and have attained the perfection of their beauty; their height throws an agreeable shade, and must be from forty to fifty feet. There is a slight feeling of parental affection in this detail; consider that I planted them all, and that I have seen them, as M. de Montbazon used to say, *not taller than that* [M. de Montbazon had a habit of making this remark upon his own children]. This is a solitude formed ex-

Digitized by Google

pressly for indulging in contemplation. Here I incessantly think of you; I regret your absence; I wish for your presence; your health, your affairs, your banishment, occupy my mind at twilight, and these lines come into my head—

> " 'What adverse star thy dawning being marr'd,
> Thou hapless object of such deep regard.'

"We must bow with the most unreserved submission to the will of God, or it would be impossible to contemplate without despair all I look forward to, and which assuredly I shall not occupy your attention by recapitulating. . . . I met the other day with a letter of yours, in which you called me 'my good mamma;' you were then ten years old, and were staying at Sainte-Marie. You recounted to me the downfall of Madame Amelot, who from the drawing-room found herself in the cellar. The letter already displays a good style. I have found a thousand others which were written at that period to Mademoiselle de Sévigné. All these accidental discoveries are most happy in bringing back remembrances of you, for without them," she adds with a sad smile, "whence should I derive that consolation?"

"We lead such a regular life," she continues, "that it would be impossible to be ill. We rise at eight o'clock, and generally until nine, when the bell rings for mass, I enjoy the freshness of the woods; after mass we dress ourselves, we exchange the courtesies of the

Digitized by Google

morning, we go and gather flowers from the orange-trees; we dine; we read or work until five. Since my son has been absent, I read to save the weak chest of his wife: at five o'clock I leave her; I go to the delightful avenues; I take my books, I change my seat, and vary the direction of my walks: a volume of devotion and a volume of history,—I go from one to the other; this gives variety to my occupation. I reflect for a time upon God and his providence, I think of my soul, dream of the future, and at eight o'clock I hear the bell which summons us to supper. Sometimes perhaps I have sauntered to a considerable distance; I rejoin my daughter-in-law in her pretty *parterre*, we form a little society in ourselves, we sup while the twilight lasts. . . . . I return with her to the Place Coulanges, in the midst of her orange-trees; and I look with a longing eye upon the holy solemnity of the woods appearing through the bars of the beautiful iron gate which you have never seen. There is an echo, '*a little voice which whispers in my ear.*'"

We know she meant to say, "which penetrates to my heart." M. de Walsh, the author of a highly characteristic biography of Madame de Sévigné, says the echo still exists; a marble slab in the *parterre* indicates to the pilgrims of the Rocks the spot where the name is to be pronounced which the mother taught the echo to repeat.

Such were the closing hours of the calm evening of Madame de Sévigné's life; they were prolonged during sixteen months; at the expiration of which death

Digitized by Google

arrived—a death true and natural after such a life: the death of a mother who had sacrificed herself for her daughter, and died in her place.

Madame de Sévigné learned at the Rocks that her daughter was attacked at the Château de Grignan in Provence, by one of those inward and lingering maladies which constitute the hidden snares of life. She set out for Grignan during a severe season, and, forgetful of herself, she exhausted her strength in three months, incessant attendance by the bedside of her daughter, just as she had formerly watched over her cradle. After a quarter of a year of fatigue and sleeplessness, Madame de Sévigné had the joy of seeing her daughter return to life, but she had given her own in exchange. Intense affection alone seemed to have enabled her to retain existence until the convalescence of Madame de Grignan, when it fled, having fulfilled its last object upon earth. She expired on the 16th of April, 1696, in the arms of her daughter, and surrounded by her weeping grandchildren. Her last glance fell upon the being enshrined in her soul, and restored to health by her care. She was interred in the chapel of the Château de Grignan; but her letters are her true and living sepulchre,—Grignan holds her body, but her correspondence contains her soul.

Not far from her tomb, travellers are shown her favourite grotto of Roche-Courbierre, upon the sides of which a fig-tree is trained, which bears some branches contemporaneous with her visit to Grignan. It was at the entrance of this grotto, and beneath the shade of

Digitized by Google

this fig-tree, that she delighted to seat herself to compose her letters. This spot is in the neighbourhood of the grottos of Vaucluse, immortalized by Petrarch, the poet she worshipped, because, like her, his existence had been absorbed by a single emotion. Madame de Sévigné, almost a poetess, was in fact the Petrarch of French prose. Like him, her life was comprised in a single name, and awoke a thousand hearts by the beatings of her own. Like him, she owes her glory to one exclusive sentiment.

Such was the uneventful life of a woman who has no other history than the feelings that emanated from the heart and mind of a mother, while pondering in her chamber upon an absent daughter. Regrets, fears, tenderness, apprehended departures, hoped-for returns, impassioned though silent meetings; family communications, the interest of which does not pass beyond the threshold; descriptions of places and sites sanctified by recollection; conversations with friends and neighbours, often the echo of some distant court rumour; the gossiping, with closed doors, of an immortal century; finally, a gentle death, concluding a life without a drama.

This comprises her whole existence: it is monotonous as the song of a nurse who rocks her infant in the cradle till death, and nevertheless the world never wearies of listening to it. The renown of the warriors, ministers, poets, and sacred orators of this period, has undergone the vicissitudes of prosperity, and is partly concealed by the obscurity of distance,—the person and letters of Madame de Sévigné have not sacrificed a

Digitized by Google

palpitation or a page to the lapse of time. We search for the most trifling notes amidst the archives of the families with which this memorable woman was connected, as we seek for hidden treasures; and the discovery of a communication from the solitary gossip of the Rocks, causes no less excitement amongst the erudite, than would the disinterment of a mutilated book of Tacitus. Why is this? It is that the human heart is even more sympathetic than curious; and that the secrets of a mother's tenderness for her child, when surprised in their natural simplicity, and stamped by the genius of sentiment, possess as deep an interest for us as the destinies of an empire. Enter the interior of all dwellings, select from the volumes lying on the mantelpiece the one oftenest purused, and bearing the marks of most constant opening, nineteen times out of twenty it will prove to be the correspondence of Madame de Sévigné; the masterpieces of human genius yield the first place to this immortal conversation. It is the classic of closed doors.

Above all, it is a book more suited to old age than to the budding years of existence: it does not possess enough of passion to satisfy youth. Before it can afford us pleasure, the first heat of life must be tamed or deadened by the progress of time. It is the book for the evening, and not for the early dawn. It has a subdued light; it abounds in shadows, reveries, a sort of vague repose, and the calmness of the setting sun. It suits the period when men, ceasing all desire to advance or to act, seat themselves before the door or at

Digitized by Google

the fireside, to discourse in a low tone of the events and crowds that occupy the world, without being tempted to mingle with them again. It is less life than a conversation upon life. This book refreshes after the heart has been exhausted by the emotions of the day,—it is the volume of repose.

There is, however, an important lesson conveyed by these pages, and the life of Madame de Sévigné. In reverting to them, mothers may learn to love as much, while daughters may be taught to love still more.

Digitized by Google

ARABIA.

ANTAR,

OR PASTORAL CIVILIZATION.

THE CENTURY BEFORE MAHOMET.

(A. D. 600.)

CIVILIZATION assumes forms as numerous and contrasted as the plans which the thoughts of the Creator have devised for the government of the human family. Providence has assigned to each distinct race, by the situation in which they are placed, and the peculiar instincts with which they are endowed, parts to perform neither better nor worse than those allotted to others, but differing only according to the manners and attributes of each. Amongst these separate nations some are sedentary by inclination; they build towns and cultivate the fields that surround them. The land, unequally divided amongst the families, and enclosed by walls or ditches, becomes an hereditary possession, transmitted from father to son. These communities

Digitized by Google

are supported by the produce of the earth, rendered fruitful through their labour.

Others live by commerce; which means, by the benefit derived, not from cultivation and amassing store, but by exchanging the produce of one country with that of another; by selling their own superfluity and buying that of their neighbours, and by carrying on a mutual traffic of all that is marketable upon the globe. Certain races become, by natural bent and geographical position, manufacturers, artisans, and fabricators of all the different implements or objects of necessity or luxury, which supply the wants or pleasures of their fellow-creatures. They delve in mines, extracting from thence iron, copper, and all the useful metals, which they fashion according to the demands of varied trades; they weave hemp, wool, and silk, from whence are formed the materials which produce the clothing of the rich and poor. They constitute the mechanical classes, who supply the furniture and moveables used throughout the world.

Others, again, live by the sea, and may be called citizens of the ocean: they are carried from place to place by its waters, and the winds are their servants. They fish; they sail from shore to shore; they construct floating palaces, they equip fleets, they dispute with other maritime nations the dominions of the waves, as agriculturists contend for the possession of the plains and valleys; they form distant settlements on unknown coasts: they plant their colonies in swarms wherever they find a landing-place. Born upon the sea-shore or

Digitized by Google

in islands, their adventurous and roving instinct carries them on in search of endless novelty. These are the classes who discover and people new continents. Peasants are the sowers of corn, but navigators are the planters of men.

Finally, there are primitive races, who are prevented by an innate and insurmountable love of movement, of change, and of liberty, from ever settling in one particular spot. Amongst these perpetual wanderers, a house appears as a prison; they fancy that they yield up a portion of their natural independence by dwelling within walls, or in acknowledging a fixed home. They look with utter contempt, pity, and horror upon cities, as mere sinks of impurity, where man disputes with man for space, air, and sunshine. They shun them as snares set by slavery to entrap freedom. Their flocks and herds form their whole riches; for these animal droves, unsettled and erratic like themselves, accompany them at their slightest caprice, and transport across the boundless desert, according to the seasons, the climate, the springs, and the fertile spots, the simple possessions and moveable habitations of the nomadic tribes: thus the shepherd-life has been denominated pastoral civilization. The distinctive sign is a tent instead of a house. From this single contrariety in the mode of dwelling, arise innumerable organic differences in the habits and customs of the inhabitants. With a house a man takes root, as a plant in the earth: he gains in security, in policy, in number, in country, in intelligence, and in govern-

Digitized by Google

ment; but he loses in liberty. Every settled community abdicates, by the act of fixed residence, the faculty of indefinite removal, which gives to the roving tribes of shepherds the sovereignty of space, the absolute dominion over sites, climates, mountains, plains and rivers—the illimitable boundary of their peregrinations. Tyranny is easily established over people congregated in large towns; they fall under servitude as natural dependencies of the country. Their churches, their palaces, their cities, their houses, their furniture, their estates, improved through succeeding generations by culture,—their arts, their luxuries, are so many securities which they pledge to the land they inhabit. They cannot carry them away when the evil hour falls upon them; and when the tyrant or the conqueror exclaims, with the sword or torch in his hand, "Submit, or lose your dwellings, your fields, and your riches," they yield up independence to preserve the hearths of their fathers and their children.

On the other hand, with the dwellers in tents neither tyranny nor conquest can be permanently established. Their country is as unbounded as space itself; every man becomes a denizen of the tribe amongst which he plants his flag. If he loses his rights of community with one, he recovers them with another. Internal despotism is never to be dreaded under a form of civilization which permits every individual who fancies that he is wounded, either in his personal dignity or liberty, to remove his tent, his family, and his possessions, and to seek a milder government and a less

Digitized by Google

absolute head. Thus, although the paternal rule is acknowledged of the natural sovereignty of every encampment, autocracy and absolute dictatorship are unknown amongst the pastoral races. They acknowledge chiefs, but obey no masters. Everything is transacted by common consent, and after public deliberation. Cities are frequently monarchical, but the desert is invariably a republic. These people, living in tents, and scarcely known in Europe, occupy in the present day, and probably will continue to possess for many generations, the largest portions of Asia, Tartary, Mongolia, and the vast regions of Central Africa. Such is the immeasurable domain they have overspread from the earliest ages. A few scattered towns have been erected from time to time, on the borders of the deserts, or even in the centre of their exclusive solitude; such, for instance, as *Cairo* in Egypt, *Palmyra* in Mesopotamia, *Baalbec* in Syria, *Samarcand*, and the great cities of Tartary and the plains at the foot of the mountains of Thibet. But these towns, like the advanced capes of a civilization with which the nature of these wanderers refuses to coalesce, are little more than extensive storehouses for commerce, — central stations for the meeting of caravans,—distant fairs, established from a very remote period, on the frontiers of the pastoral nations, for the convenience of buying the wool of their flocks, or of selling to them in return the few manufactures which their habits require. Continually assailed by the rushing tide of invasion, and circumscribed by the desert, these capitals, often over-

Digitized by Google

run and soon destroyed under hostile incursions, leave only on the ground they once occupied, magnificent ruins, such as those of Thebes, Heliopolis, Palmyra, Babylon, Persepolis, and Utica ;—enigmatical vestiges, which cause the traveller who contemplates them to wonder how such grandeur could ever have sprung up in the desert, and buried itself in the sand! The sedentary population of these ant-hills of the tribes has dried up and withered away, while the roving shepherds still plant their tents on the spots where Imperial residences once existed. The camel, which is to the animal world what the cypress is to the vegetable kingdom, a symbol of mourning and eternity, browses on the brambles and thistles between the prostrate columns of Baalbec and Palmyra.

We do not propose here to confine our observations to the pastoral tribes who approach the nearest to us on the side of Asia Minor. These latter have beheld passing around and amidst them the Medes, the Persians, the Egyptians, the Romans, the Crusaders of Europe, without being engulfed in the current of opposing civilizations, or in the destruction of successive empires. These tribes gave birth to Mahomet, the restorer of the unity of God throughout a quarter of the globe. They were the first who acknowledged his moral code, his earliest followers in the campaigns against idolatry ; and having subjected all the capitals of the East and the Indies to the religion of their prophet, they returned peaceably and unambitiously to their pastoral avocations and their enduring encamp-

Digitized by Google

ment in the desert. Such are the peasants, and sometimes the warriors, of the three Arabias.

The widely-spread territory, anciently divided into three distinct regions—the *Happy*, the *Stony*, and the *Deserted*—occupies the wide tract which extends from Egypt and Syria, between the mountains of Libanus and Palestine, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. Damascus and Bagdad are in the present day the two most important capitals which advance the furthest within the boundless domain of the Arabian shepherds, and carry on the greatest intercourse with their different tribes. Mecca, the metropolis of Islamism; Medina, the burial-place of the Prophet; and Djidda, the principal sea-port, rear aloft their holy structures, peopled by stationary Arabs, and separated from each other by vast intervals, entirely abandoned to the nomadic races. With the exception of the immediate neighbourhood of these towns, and some few spots of productive land in Yemen—the cultivated portion of Arabia Felix—the desert extends over all the remaining part. During the forty days' march between Damascus and Bagdad, as in the sixty between Bagdad and Medina, the caravans encounter no dwelling-places but tents, and no vegetation beyond the scant and thorny herbage which stains with blood the lips of the camel.

This desert, which I have myself traversed throughout, the plains of which Damascus seems the border, and across the sandy valleys which extend between the Libanus and Anti-Libanus, present a succession of

Digitized by Google

downs which undulate like waves, from Jerusalem to Egypt. It impresses on the senses and the soul the same perception of infinity which we derive from the ocean. It is in fact a sea without motion, and appears, like the real one, to be bounded only by the horizon. In proportion as you advance, the summits of the lofty chains of the Taurus and Lebanon diminish to the view, and are finally lost in a distant haze. The firmament seems to constitute the sole limit. The road or track lies alternately along a barren or rocky surface, which resounds as if it were hollow, under the pressure of the caravan; sometimes it passes over a yielding earth, from whence spring up stalks of dry grass, and large onions of coloquintida. More frequently your steps sink deep in fine sand, perpetually disturbed by the wind, and whirled into moveable hillocks or deep hollows, through which the camel-driver endeavours to discover a passage by a thousand tortuous windings.

When the road is entirely closed up by one of these barriers of sand, the whole caravan is obliged to surmount it, and you suddenly behold the leading camel of the file emerge from the desert on the top of one of these moving eminences, like a vessel hidden from view by the depth of the waves, which shows itself one moment on the summit of a mass of foam, and disappears again when hurled down into the hollow trough of the sea.

Occasionally at certain distances, between sunrise and sunrise, and sometimes with an interval of four days' march, a well or a cistern is encountered, the

Digitized by Google

approach to which is indicated to the eye by tall reeds, which form a green spot in the distance on the yellow surface; or by a large spreading sycamore, whose bare and blackened roots retain the traces of fires kindled by shepherds and passing caravans.

The camp is usually pitched in the close vicinity of these wells. All wait patiently until the horses, the camels, the goats, and the sheep, wearied by a toilsome march, or collected in from some scanty pasture-ground in the neighbourhood, have slowly slaked their thirst in the troughs, incessantly replenished from the water-skins carried by half-naked black slaves. The tents are elevated; some of the women and children disperse themselves around to gather up the dead branches of shrubs, or the dried dung of the camels, the sole combustibles which supply the evening fire. Others are occupied in bruising grains of *doura*, or wheat, between two stones, to knead the bread. The slaves ungirth the leathern bags, which during the day cover up the teats of the camels to prevent them from suckling their young; they bring vessels filled with milk into the tents,—they give the superfluity to the horses: they attend to all the necessities of the family, and leave the mothers free to administer to the wants of the children.

During these halts, the men, who are disposed to idleness, or who hold in contempt all active occupations except war and the chase, group themselves in a circle round the tent of the sheik. They smoke their *narghilies* in silent composure, or discourse confi-

Digitized by Google

dentially on the affairs of the tribe. Orators, endowed with the inborn and practised eloquence which free discussion strengthens, even amongst wandering communities, speak in rotation; some with sententious and monotonous gravity, others in occasional bursts of deep guttural energy, accompanied by gesticulations and attitudes, and with a passionate vehemence which invests the direction of a march through the sand with as much importance as it would bestow upon the government of a mighty empire. Whatever may be the reputation of a warrior for valour, he can never hope to exercise a commanding influence in the camp, if nature has not endowed him richly with the gift of words. The pastoral Arab has no respect for courage unless directed by superior intelligence; he trusts only to those whom he feels to be his superiors in mind as in strength. He resists force, but yields to persuasion.

Poetry in the desert is equally honoured with eloquence. The Arabs, at the same time warriors, talkers, and dreamers, exalt to equal eminence amongst the illustrious ornaments of their nation, whether living or dead, those only who have been distinguished as orators in the debate, heroes in the battle-field, and bards in the leisure of peace. Their sports and recreations strongly mark the passion of the roving Arab for poetry associated with music. A stringed instrument, resembling a rustic guitar, often resounds under his fingers through the silence of the night. With this he accompanies his verses, sustains his recitations, and regulates the steps of his young wives and daughters

Digitized by Google

in the mysterious nocturnal dances which form the spectacular exhibitions of the tribes. These dances, compounded of poetry and music, and denominated *Mazamen*, bear the impress of the imaginative, self-contained, and impassioned genius which marks the character of this singular race. They are exhibited under the modesty of the veil and the shadow of darkness. The presence of the whole tribe, and the distance severely maintained between the sexes, impart a character of reserve and gravity to these festivals, which serves to sanctify love, while provoking and restraining, at the same time, the ardent feelings of youth.

At a late hour, arranged beforehand between the families of the same tribe, the wives and daughters assemble in a row behind the tents, and sing in chorus an invitation to the youths to join them in their sports. The young men issue forth at the sound of their voices; they place themselves in a single line, like spectators, in front of and opposite to the line of female dancers. A sufficient space is left between for the necessary evolutions. When the two banks are thus ranged face to face, not far from the tents, and under the canopy of a heaven half lit by the stars of that beautiful and brilliant sky, one of the young men extemporizes a warlike lay in slow and melancholy measure. He repeats the same verse several times, while his companions reiterate alternately the last word, as a burden. Then the singer proceeds with the subject, repeating constantly the line which furnishes each verse, and accompanying the words with expressive attitudes, which associate

Digitized by Google

the movements of the body with the thought or sentiment expressed in the different stanzas. These gesticulations are copied by his male companions while they listen. On hearing the voices and observing the measured attitudes of the men, two or three young damsels issue from the group, half concealed by blue veils, the skirts of which, raised gently by their arms, fall again upon their naked feet. They advance softly into the vacant space, always following the cadence of the song, until within two or three paces of the line of men, who, excited by admiration, poetry, music, and mystery, applaud most vehemently the steps of the dancers, and encourage them by flattering exclamations, borrowed from the pastoral vocabulary with which they caress the young camels.

Some, carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment, or happening to recognise under the veils the selected objects of affection they have coveted from infancy, tear off their white turbans, disengage the folds, and extend them at the distance of some paces upon the sand, to serve as a carpet under the feet of the dancers. If any one of the young girls, in gliding over this covering, happens to raise it adroitly upon the point of her toe, and to throw it behind her towards the line of women, loud shouts of approbation are instantly raised; the turban, the shawl, the necklaces, the trinkets which the men have thus thrown down as a challenge, belong to the dancer: they must be ransomed on the following day by a present to the family. As soon as one of the *figurantes* has retired, a fresh

Digitized by Google

one takes her place. The music, the poetry, the transports of the spectators, continue to excite the dancing of the females until the latest hours of night. We may readily conceive what the triple intoxication of voice, sound, and motion, adds to the effect of these desert festivals, carried on under a dim twilight in a balmy atmosphere, as if by intangible phantoms, beneath whose veils every enamoured youth fancies that he descries the chosen partner of his dreams, the sharer of his future happiness. The most religious decency is here mingled with an utterly absorbing illusion; the praises of the Divine Being are sung by poets, and pleasure is consecrated by prayer. These nocturnal fêtes, at which the occupiers of many different encampments scattered through the desert collect together from vast distances, are denominated in the tents, the *Mazamen*, or *the Song of the Psalms*.

The *tent* itself—the house of the wandering Arab—is a species of religious and civil institution, and of uniform construction. Tradition has fixed, measured, named, and consecrated all its separate divisions. No arbitrary caprice has for many centuries effected the slightest change in any compartment; it is, in fact, a domicile of wood and canvas, the dimensions of which are regulated by the strength of the camel by which it is carried.

This equal palace of the rich and poor is raised and removed throughout the desert upon one uniform plan. Every part has its place, particular use, and distribution, regularly assigned and limited. There is a style

Digitized by Google

of architecture for this mass of linen, as for the Parthenon. The Arabs call the whole, *the house:* the poles by which it is supported they name *the columns;* of these there are nine,—three in the centre, and three on each side. The nine columns form three naves, or divisions, separated by hangings of felt, and reserved for distinct purposes. The tissue of black goats'-hair which surmounts the columns, and rests on a transversal pole fitted to the centre, is called *the roof.* This is again doubled by a second and thicker covering of the same material, impervious to rain. The apartment in the middle of the tent is the common hall, destined for the reception of guests. That on the left is occupied by the men, while the corresponding one on the right is reserved for the women. Many ropes of camels'-hair, fastened to the different hangings on the summit of the tent, and tightly stretched, like the rigging of a mast, are secured by iron rings to pickets fixed all round in the earth, to secure the stability of the edifice against the power of the wind. According to the season and the hour, they raise or let fall the linen door, called *rouhok,* which closes or opens the bottom of the tent. The curtain, of white wool, made at Damascus, which separates the apartment of the women, or the harem, from the central portion of the habitation, is embroidered with coloured flowers. The floor is covered with mats of straw, over which are spread rich carpets of Bagdad. A pile of sacks, caparisons of horses, pack-saddles of camels, provisions or arms, is heaped in a pyramid round the central column.

Digitized by Google

The slaves and dogs have their assigned position at the foot of the column which supports the vestibule. A slight piece of cloth, added to the covering of the tent, floating loosely in the breeze and resembling a pent-house, affords them a scanty shelter from the inclemency of the weather: this is the servile compartment, the refuge of the mendicant.

This dwelling-place is raised and removed in a few moments, according to the wealth of the master, and the number of his family or of the slaves, whenever the tribe shifts its place of encampment. A file of camels, more or less extended, is loaded with the columns, the clothes, the bags, the furniture, and the provisions of the removing establishment; the men mount their horses, the women and children are carried on the beasts of burden. A sort of broad and flat throne is sketched like a platform over the pack-saddles of the camels, and serves as a post of honour for the wives and daughters of the sheiks. This seat, covered with scarlet leather and rich carpets, forms the chief pride of the women: they decorate the black camel, which they always select in preference, with housings and trappings of different-coloured stuffs, the fringes of which trail on the ground or flutter in the breeze. The halter, which serves as a bridle for the animal, is ornamented with beads and ostrich feathers. Small bells are suspended from the necks of the milch-camels, to retain the young near their mothers. The men gallop in the front or in the flank of the caravan, reconnoitre the desert, watch the flocks on the line of march,

Digitized by Google

and anxiously examine the horizon. The family, and sometimes the entire tribe, generally composed of fifteen or twenty tents, advance in this order towards a fresh well or a new pasturage. They find their country again wherever the sheik or the elders give the signal to unload the camels, and pitch their temporary residences.

These eternal navigators of the sea of sand, have contracted by similarity of manners, by contemplation of the same scenes, by inhabiting the same spaces, and by the constant movement of the same steps over similar sites, a personal character analogous to the character of the desert: religious as the infinity that surrounds them, free as the expanse open to their view; roving as the horse, the camel, or the herd of cattle, which carries or follows them; hospitable as the open tent to the traveller bewildered in those vast solitudes; intrepid, as becomes men who owe their safety to the strength of their own arms, and who are ever compelled to be on the watch to defend their wives, their children, their springs of fresh water, and their pasture-lands from the sudden incursions of other tribes, fierce, unsettled, and wandering like themselves. They are habitually grave and silent as the waste that surrounds them, but sometimes loquacious and communicative as men who meet with men in a hurried, casual interview, and who hasten to exchange mutual inquiries and to impart reciprocal information. They are as contemplative and poetical as the nights, the days, the stars, the boundless horizons which are invariably before them. Finally, they

Digitized by Google

are relators of stories, long as the slowly-progressing, unemployed hours, which can only be filled up by marvellous recitations, while they sit under the shelter of the tent or round the margin of the well or spring, to beguile the heavy march of time.

He who has never gazed upon the sun sinking in the haze of a red furnace reflected by the sand from the distant horizon of Mesopotamia or Chaldæa; who has never beheld the constellations rise and decline slowly during the summer nights in that ocean of ethereal blue, deeper than the thought which penetrates it, and more transparent than the motionless sea under the shadow of a cape which checks the glittering undulation of the waves; he who has not listened to the intermittent sighing of the wind drowsily borne across the desert, and carried gradually to the ear over downs of sand and through scattered patches of herbage; he who has not with early dawn gazed upon the boundless expanse stretched before him on every side, until distance is lost in infinity; or who has never at mid-day contemplated the shadowy profile of the crouching camel, delineated distinctly on the background of the clear firmament, immovable as the sculptured sphinx upon the burning sand of Egypt,—such a man can form no adequate idea of the true character of the Arabian shepherd, or of the charm which attaches and reconciles him to his lot.

The impressions, the sensations, the emotions of feeling,—the sounds, the stillness, the thoughts of the desert—come from such a distance that they seem to

Digitized by Google

proceed from the Eternal himself. That light which falls in a shower of fire upon the hills or naked plains, has never been reflected from the roof of a city, and has received no contamination from the smoke of human chimneys. Throughout the day, nothing interposes between the soul and its Author. We feel the hand of the Creator, invisible yet palpable, upon the objects of his creation: we expect at every moment to see him manifest himself in the midst of that ocean of light which veils him, or upon the limits of that indefinite horizon which seems to verge on the unknown.

During the night, our eyes wander amongst the stars, following or preceding them in their various courses, and we become, as it were, agents and assistants in that developed mechanism of the universe, which is in truth the act of faith of the heavens. Religion, the act of faith of the earth, is born of astronomy in the deserts of Chaldæa. The letters which compose the Divine name are read there in most resplendent characters upon the pages of the firmament. Imagination is fed by visions and illusions; supernatural appearances, the incarnations of truth in a dream, have prevailed there ever since the commencement of the world. Man, oppressed by the mysteries of piety and faith, longs passionately for the only inspiration worthy of his nature,—that of infinity and eternity.

All the prevailing forms of worship have sprung from these solitudes, from the Star-deity who governs the worlds of Zoroaster, to the Allah of Mahomet; from

Digitized by Google

the legislative Jehovah of Moses, to the True Word sought for amidst the obscurity of night by the shepherds of Bethlehem. The Arab—mysterious as silence, meditative as darkness, concentrated as solitude, thirsting after miracles as an eternal calling forth of the secrets of heaven—has a keener sense than we can ever attain of the presence of God in the desert; his life is one unvarying and uninterrupted adoration, which nothing distracts from his Creator. Boundless space is the most imposing of all temples. There can be no atheism face to face with Nature. Take an avowed atheist from the West, and place him for a few years in the East, and he will return completely cured of that infirmity of mind. Atheism can only spring up in the shade, in the thoughtlessness and whirl of western cities. The sun kills unbelief, which resembles the cold poisons that cannot fructify except under the mantle of darkness.

Silent and interminable space impresses upon the Arab a more exalted and more uncontrolled perception of his personal dignity. Man feels depressed and crushed in a crowd, but elevated and expanded in solitude. He who is alone, feels that he is important; for he measures himself by his natural standard, and not by the undistinguishable numerical value which his single existence represents in a populous city or nation. This conviction of his individual greatness renders him incapable of debasement, rebellious against tyranny, and indisposed to servitude: he obeys his religion, the divine sovereignty of family ties, the customs and

Digitized by Google

manners which habit has sanctified; but he never submits to force unsupported by right: he possesses his horse to fly from oppression, his weapon to struggle with it, and space in which to bury his freedom. His faults are those of kings, not slaves. He is generous and compassionate; he spares the conquered, protects the infant, and deifies the female sex; he affords shelter to all who throw themselves upon his protection, even to his enemy; he treats his slaves like adopted brothers bestowed upon him by Providence as a second family, of which he is the guardian, but never becomes the tyrant. Such are the leading characteristics of the wandering tribes of the three districts of Arabia from the time of Abraham to the present day. It was necessary to describe them before relating the adventures of Antar, the modern David of the desert. His life comprises at once a poem and a history, in which the poet, the lover, and the hero are blended in one and the same person, and are thus combined to encourage and strengthen the Arabs in the three illusions which exercise unbounded empire over their imaginations—heroism, love, and poetry.

The birth of Antar is as romantic as his life. We can fancy that we are perusing a simple yet strange narrative of the patriarchal age. Thus it is handed down to us. *Zobeir*, chief or king of the tribe of *Abs*, a numerous and warlike community of Yemen, came to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. Both wandering and settled Arabs, before Mahomet, were in the habit of visiting that holy place, to worship in the first temple

Digitized by Google

erected by Abraham, and sanctified by tradition. Zobeir, with his attendants, established himself in the environs of the city. Young, powerful, and acknowledged also as chief by other tribes less populous than his own, he sought a wife amongst the damsels of his race. The report of the miraculous beauty of the daughter of an independent sheik called Amrou inflamed him with the desire of calling her his own. The name of this celebrated virgin was Themadour. Zobeir hesitated to demand the hand of Themadour from Amrou, fearing a refusal in consequence of an hereditary feud between the families: under this apprehension he had recourse to artifice. He invited Amrou to a festival in his encampment; and while his guest, in the confidence and enjoyment of hospitality, laid aside all mistrust, Zobeir issued secret orders to a chosen band of warriors, selected from a neighbouring tribe, to attack the tents of Amrou under cover of the night, to disperse his flocks, and terrify his unprotected family: but at the same time he strictly forbade them to be guilty of the slightest outrage against the wife or daughter of Amrou.

These secret orders were executed with implicit obedience. The appointed horsemen assailed the encampment of Amrou, scattered his slaves before them, carried off the cattle, and drove them into a defile of the mountains. The result of this premeditated attack speedily reached the knowledge of Zobeir. He dissimulated his joy, and rushed forth into the desert at the head of his bravest warriors, as if flying to the succour

Digitized by Google

of his guest. He arrived first on the threshold of the tent of Amrou, who, receiving the intelligence later, followed at some distance. The beautiful Themadour, his daughter, stood bathed in tears at the entrance of her father's dwelling; she cast her eyes upon the scattered flocks, and raised her arms to heaven, imploring succour or revenge. "Her cheeks," says the poet Antar, "were flushed as the peony, her locks black and thick as the darkness of night; the tears which gathered without falling, in her eyelids, augmented the brilliancy of her eyes."

Zobeir, transported and bewildered by her beauty, ordered an old follower who accompanied him, to cover the young damsel respectfully with a veil; he then started off with his horsemen in pursuit of the pretended robbers, and soon returned with the thousand camels and slaves of Amrou, which he delivered up in safety and uninjured at the tents of his friend. During this imitation of combat and deliverance, Amrou had hastened in person to the succour of his family and tribe. He saw with his own eyes the zeal and ardent generosity of Zobeir, and prayed him to accept in turn the hospitality he had proffered. "Zobeir!" exclaimed Amrou, during the festival given in honour of the liberator of his daughter, "if my heart cannot pour itself out in gratitude, it will burst: I have nothing more precious to offer than my child Themadour: I bestow her upon thee as thy slave!" "I accept her," replied Zobeir, "not as a slave, but as my wife." At these words the damsels of the tribe conducted The-

Digitized by Google

madour, veiled, into the presence of Zobeir, and, removing the curtain, disclosed her radiant beauty to the eyes of her future husband. Zobeir carried his lovely conquest back to his own tribe, and yielded himself up to the intoxication of unalloyed happiness.

Meanwhile Themadour, although rejoicing in the love with which she had inspired Zobeir, and which she ardently returned, felt her pride mortified that she had been vanquished as a slave, and not purchased with rich gifts to her father, like a free-born maiden, and in compliance with the manners of her nation. The incautious Zobeir, glorying in the success of his scheme, had, in the delirium of affection, confessed it to his bride. Themadour vowed secretly to herself to punish the subterfuge of Zobeir by another subterfuge, and to compel him to pay to her father the value of her dowry.

One night, while she was familiarly reproaching him with the stratagem he had practised to obtain possession of her without disbursing the lawful purchase, Zobeir became inflamed with anger, and rising up suddenly from the couch, replied, that she was foolhardy to speak thus to her husband and her master. "It is well!" rejoined Themadour, smiling; "know then that your trick has been counteracted by one more subtle and more skilfully executed. I am not that Themadour whose charms you so insatiably coveted; I am only her sister and shadow; the matchless beauty for which I have been substituted to satisfy

Digitized by Google

you, reposes under the tent of my father, Amrou, inaccessible to your arms and desires."

Zobeir at these words became troubled and suspicious. "If you do not credit what I say," continued Themadour, "send some aged female to my mother with a message; she will be admitted without difficulty into the presence of the women in their private apartments, and my sister's veil will be removed before her." "No!" answered Zobeir, "I shall adopt a better plan; I will go myself. I will assume the garb of a seller of aromatics, and with my box of perfumes in my hand, I shall obtain free access into the tent, and shall behold the countenance of your sister." Immediately after this conversation, Zobeir ordered his slaves to keep his tent closed for three days, that none might discover or suspect his absence; he dressed himself as an itinerant merchant, took under his arm a small case of aromatics, and, barefooted, his loins girt with a large leathern belt, he issued unperceived from his tent before sunrise, and bent his course towards the encampment of Amrou. Scarcely had he departed in this disguise, when Themadour, concealing herself in her turn from the drowsy slaves, under the garb of a warrior, issued from the tent, untied the swiftest courser belonging to her husband, and, galloping at full speed in the direction of her father's camp, passed, without being recognised, the pretended trader in perfumes, and arrived before him at the tent of her mother. Without losing a moment, she imparted to her father and brethren the plan she had conceived

Digitized by Google

for vindicating the honour of the family. She placed them in ambuscade under the shadow of a wood of date-trees in the close vicinity of the camp; told them to hasten at her call, and surprise Zobeir unarmed in the tent; to chain him to the pillar in the centre, and not to restore him to liberty until he bound himself by oath to pay to her father, Amrou, the value of his daughter. Then, laying aside her male attire, Themadour covered herself with the virgin veil, and waited the arrival of the false merchant. "Enter, seller of perfumes!" cried aloud the mother, as soon as she perceived him hovering like a fox round the tents; "thou shalt set forth thy stores before my daughter Themadour, who delights in the sweet scents of Yemen." At this name of Themadour, Zobeir began to believe firmly that he had been deceived by Amrou. "Have you then another daughter?" demanded he of the mother. "Yes," she replied, "we had a second, called Klida, much less beautiful than Themadour. We changed her name, and gave her, under the pretended denomination of Themadour, to Zobeir, to revenge ourselves for the insult he had offered to our family by accepting from us a wife without offering in return her value. We have kept with us the true Themadour, the wonder of all our tribes, to bestow her at the highest possible price, on a warrior of Yemen."

Zobeir, at this avowal, blushed with indignation and shame. Forgetting his assumed character of a merchant, he began to think of carrying off by violence the beauty of which he had been deprived; when sud-

Digitized by Google

denly Amrou, his sons, and brothers, rushing forth from the wood of dates towards the camp, fell like a herd of lions upon Zobeir, bound him hand and foot, and stretched him, but without wounds, on the carpet of the tent. Themadour, his avenged wife, dropping then the veil to her feet, smiled with pride mingled with tenderness on the captive Zobeir, and gloried in having beaten stratagem by stratagem. Zobeir, humiliated, but at the same time happy that he had been conquered by his wife alone, agreed to bestow upon his father-in-law, Amrou, one thousand camels, twenty thorough-bred horses,—bearing round their necks the genealogy of the races they were descended from,—fifty male slaves, and an equal number of young girls to wait upon his wife. On these terms he was set at liberty, and reconducted with all honour by the family of Amrou to his own encampment.

Six sons, endowed with the strength and courage of lions, and a single daughter, beautiful as her mother, were the produce of this union. The sons became chieftains of the tribe of Abs, of which Antar was the hero.

Schedad, one of the relations of this family, called more commonly "the master of Sivvet," from the name of a celebrated mare in his possession, happened on one particular occasion to engage in a predatory excursion with two cavaliers, as adventurous and as well mounted as himself, to carry off the slaves and flocks of the Arabs of *Cathan*. But the aggressors found the opposing tribe so numerous that they dared not to attack them during the day, but waited the

Digitized by Google

approach of night, and withdrew into the desert that they might find pasturage for their horses. A black slave of incomparable beauty, accompanied by two small children, kept guard over the camels of the tribe of Cathan. The companions of Schedad hastened to bridle their chargers, drove the camels before them, and carried off the two children and the beautiful black slave. On the report of this abduction, a thousand mounted warriors poured forth from the tents of Cathan, in pursuit of the plunderers. Schedad, regardless of the number of his enemies, caused his companions, the troop of camels, the black slave, and the children, to plunge into a narrow defile. He placed himself at the entrance, with four of his chosen band, defended the pass until the approach of night, and strewed the earth at his feet with piles of dead and wounded assailants. During this contest, his associates conducted their spoil in safety to the sea-shore. Schedad having rejoined them, disdained to claim any share of the booty acquired by his own arm, but, smitten by the charms of the black slave, he demanded that she should be given up to him as his sole reward.

The passion of the Arabs for the dark beauties of Abyssinia, whose features exhibit the perfection of Grecian statues, is commemorated by all the poets of the East. "Black amber," say they in their verses, "above all other perfumes, intoxicates the senses with its odour." This fascinating slave, already the mother of two children carried off with her, was

Digitized by Google

called *Zebedeha*. Schedad conducted her to his tent, loved her with a constant affection, and became through her the father of a son. This offspring of the warrior Schedad and the dark slave, Zebedeha, was named *Antar*.

The strength and precocious intelligence of the young black, were remarked by the comrades of Schedad from his earliest years. They demanded as their right the possession of a child, born, as they said, of a female slave whom they had consented to yield up to Schedad, but without resigning their claim to her posterity. Schedad refused to deliver up his own blood to servitude. The case was referred to Zobeir himself. "Let the child be brought before me," said he, "that I may judge with my own eyes of the object in dispute. At these words Schedad went out, and returned holding his son by the hand. At the moment when the boy entered the tent of the sheik, an enormous dog had seized an antelope, and was rushing forth with the captive between his teeth. No one present dared to deprive him of his prey. The child Antar, without order or prompting, disengaged himself from the grasp of his father, fell furiously upon the dog, grappled him by the throat, compelled him to release the trembling victim, and seizing the jaws of the animal with each hand, and with irresistible force, wrenched them asunder, even to the back of his neck. The dog fell dead at the feet of the infant.* "I can readily be-

* There seems to be some resemblance between this tradition and the story of Hercules strangling serpents in his cradle. The earlier fable may have suggested the later one.—TRANSL.

Digitized by Google

lieve," said Zobeir, "that many may desire to obtain possession of such a son, but the law awards him to Schedad. Is it not written, 'He who has sown the seed should gather the harvest; he who has planted a tree has a right to the fruit?'" Schedad carried back his boy, and replaced him in the arms of Zebedeha his mother.

The child, retaining the attributes of his double origin, as the son of a free chieftain by a favourite slave, was treated by his father sometimes as a son and occasionally as his serf. He was appointed to watch the flocks in the desert, but he delighted in combats with the wild animals. One evening, on returning to the tent, he cast his wallet, stained with blood, at the feet of Zebedeha, his mother. She opened it, and trembled with apprehension when she found within, the head of a lion, severed by the hand of Antar.

Full of generous feeling as of undaunted courage, he one day killed, with a single blow of his iron arm, the principal shepherd of Zobeir, who disputed possession of the well with a poor old woman, whose goats were expiring with thirst. At this all the slaves of Zobeir fell upon Antar in a body to revenge their chief. Antar, snatching up a knotty staff which lay upon the sand, defended himself singly against a multitude, and stretched many of his assailants dead at his feet. Hearing the noise of the strife, the young Melik, son of Zobeir, who was hunting in the plain, galloped towards the well, and beheld Antar surrounded by a thousand foes. He contemplated with wonder the

Digitized by Google

prodigious strength and gallant intrepidity of the young Negro, and, moved by pity and admiration, flew to his assistance, vowing towards him an eternal friendship. He scattered the slaves, covered Antar with his sabre, caused him to walk by the side of his horse, protected him from the anger of his master, obtained his pardon, and restored him to the tent of Schedad. The wives and daughters of the tribe of Schedad pressed forth from behind the curtains that concealed them, to greet the triumph of the young dark-coloured slave, the prodigy of men, the champion of the helpless, and the protector of the weaker sex.

Amongst the lovely throng, Antar beheld only *Abla*, the idol of his soul. Abla, the most beautiful virgin of the tribe of Abs, was the daughter of Malek, brother of Schedad, and thus the cousin of her adorer. Owing to this relationship, and the close intimacy that existed between the tents of Schedad and Malek, they had lived from infancy in that familiar intercourse which the manners of Arabia permit between children of the same blood. From infancy also, the love which was destined to form the misfortune, the glory, and the happiness of Antar, seemed to have sprung up, and to strengthen between them as they grew to maturity. They had not as yet made any mutual avowal of this early attachment, but the passion breathed in all their thoughts.

Antar began to compose and sing in Arabic verses, while tending the camels of his father Schedad, in solitude: the unvarying theme of his song was his cousin Abla. All the poetic imagery of the desert, he

Digitized by Google

day, the night, the sun, the stars, the shadow, the dew, the palm-trees, the eyes of the gazelle, were borrowed by the shepherd-bard from the nature with which he was acquainted, to conjure up and place before the eyes of his imagination the image of Abla, and to convey the impression which her presence, the sound of her voice, or even the remembrance of her charms, produced upon his soul.

But although these first verses of Antar, retained by the memory of his companions, and repeated by the young damsels within the tents, had already rendered his name famous amongst the children of Abs, an accent of melancholy and depression accompanied the close of every song. Born of a mother who was a black slave, and a black slave himself, although cherished as legitimate by his father, Antar did not conceal from himself that his love for Abla was, in the eyes of the Arabs, a species of sacrilege, and that Malek, her father, would never, unless through a miracle, bestow his daughter upon a man stamped with the colour of servitude. It was then this all-controlling passion for Abla, which happily inspired him with the idea or the dream of attempting prodigies of heroism, which should overcome destiny, and conquer the hand of her who had so completely subdued his heart. "I will hurl myself," he exclaimed in impassioned verse, "into the dust of the battle; I will raise myself to the topmost pinnacle of glory, O Abla, or I will fall under the arrows of thy father's enemies! Then thou wilt either weep over my body, extended at thy feet and covered with wounds,

Digitized by Google

or thy father will bestow thee upon my delivering hand."

The uncles of Abla, feeling irritated and humiliated that a vile slave of Negro skin should dare to lift his eyes to their niece, contrived a thousand snares to entrap the young, aspiring lover, and to procure his destruction, either in contest with warriors, or in a struggle with the savage Arabs of the desert. His strength and courage enabled him to defeat any ambush that was formed to entrap him to ruin or death. One day his uncles, having sent him, unarmed, to seek their camels by the margin of the sea, at a place enclosed by lofty rocks, the haunt of an enormous lion, and in the hope of thus getting rid of his unwelcome presence for ever, found him on the following morning, to their utter astonishment, asleep upon the body of the lion, which he had contrived to kill. Admiration and respect for the colossal stature and supernatural strength of Antar, struggled within them against the hatred by which they were animated towards their nephew. They fancied that they read once more the history of Joseph, envied and persecuted by his brethren.

During the absence of all the warriors of the tribe of Abs, who had departed on a distant expedition, the women, the children, the old men, the flocks, the treasure, and the tents, were confided to the charge of Antar alone. The horsemen of Cathan profited by this opportunity to surprise the encampment.

Antar, who had posted himself at some distance on

Digitized by Google

the summit of a hill, beheld a cloud of armed men burst like a thunderstorm over the residence of Abla. One of these cavaliers bound her on his horse behind him, and was already flying with his prey; Antar darted after him with the speed of an antelope, outstripped his courser, killed the robber, delivered Abla, and placed her upon the grass stained with his blood. He then threw himself upon the horse of the warrior he had slain, pursued the band of depredators, overtook them one by one, and marked the track of the desert by the bodies of the enemies he killed. He then returned, an avenged conqueror, delivered Abla to her mother, and was hailed by the benedictions and applause of the entire tribe.

The bard of his own exploits, Antar extols with the innate, simple pride of an Arab, the incomparable strength of his arm. "Behold me in my proper element," he cries, while apostrophizing his opponents lying scattered and lifeless at his feet; "I breathe blood: my force is irresistible; my sabre cleaves like a thunderbolt; no warrior can escape from its blow; the bow and the sword have been my playthings from the cradle. I quench my thirst with wine, old as the world! I hear the voice, which I prefer alone to the sound of clashing iron in the combat, when men encounter and fall together in the death-struggle—the voice of my adored Abla! Oh, Abla! Abla! thou art the only dream of my soul, and I seek renown for no other motive than the hope that the day may yet arrive when I shall

Digitized by Google

cease to be the object of thy contempt! I am black, it is true, but I feel confident that I shall subdue envy, and annihilate all that opposes me! I fight for Abla alone! I am her slave for ever!"

After having thus chanted his triumph, and brought back all the women and children in safety under the shelter of the tents, Antar departed anew upon one of the horses captured in the pursuit, and led into the camp of Schedad the coursers of the foes he had slain. It was unanimously agreed, out of respect to the women, and particularly on account of Semeha, the legitimate spouse of Schedad, to conceal from him this incursion of enemies into his camp: but Schedad, on his return, having gone to inspect the flocks, was lost in astonishment to find superb war-horses grazing with his own, under the guard of Antar. "Wretch!" exclaimed he to his son, "it is therefore to carry off the chosen coursers of our brethren of the desert, that thou art accustomed to wander far from the precincts of the camp, and that thou hidest like a brigand amongst inaccessible rocks. It is impossible to expect good from such as thou; robbery and murder are mingled with thy blood; thou wilt bring shame and dishonour on the name of the tribe which has given an asylum to thy mother."

So saying, Schedad struck his innocent son fiercely and frequently with the handle of the whip which he carried in his hand, and binding him with cords to the trunk of a sycamore, left him exposed to the prowling animals of the night. But Semeha, his wife, perceiving

Digitized by Google

from a distance the uplifted arm of her husband, and hearing the suppressed groans of Antar under the discipline of his father, ran, bathed in tears, to cover him with her own body, and confessed to Schedad the invasion of the horsemen of Cathan, and the achievements of the youthful black, so cruelly punished for his valour. Schedad embraced his son, wept over him with mingled joy and pride on hearing this recital of his exploits, and carried him into the presence of the King Zobeir, who from that moment admitted him into the ranks of his warriors. Thenceforward Antar ceased to be enrolled amongst the slaves of Schedad his father, and signalized his prowess in the many wars of Zobeir against the other tribes of Yemen.

On their return from battle, Zobeir invited him to sit at the festivals. Antar, like Achilles relaxing himself with his lyre, sang at the royal table the victories of the tribe, and his own personal achievements. He never failed to mingle the name of Abla with his songs of war and love, demanding of glory to be elevated to a sufficient height in the esteem of his countrymen, to merit, with the hand of Abla, the sole reward of his valour and genius.

Many cantos of the poem of Antar are dedicated to the recital of these prodigies of his arm throughout the long years of trial during which Schedad and Malek refused to bestow on him the gift of his mistress. In a doubtful position, always undetermined between slavery and liberty, he several times, but in vain, preserved the honour of the tribe and the life of Abla;

Digitized by Google

but still Arab pride revolted against the idea of a union between a free-born damsel and a black slave. His verses at this epoch consist of plaintive, and sometimes menacing, lamentations on his hard destiny.

Overwhelmed with distinctions and regard by the King Zobeir, Antar was unable to obtain the only title he coveted, that of the recognised and legitimate son of his father Schedad. "Vile bastard!" exclaimed his sire in answer to his urgent remonstrances, "darest thou pretend to the rank of my other children; thou, the offspring of a slave; thou who bearest the infamy of thy birth written upon thy skin?"

Antar, driven to despair by these harsh words, bent his head, and plunging alone into the desert, with the reins abandoned on his horse's neck, thus gave vent to his misfortunes:—

"In vain I struggle with my evil lot! I have saved my fellow-men; I expected to find protectors in my own kindred; they have proved themselves more injurious than serpents under my footsteps. They say that on the field of battle I am equal to the sons of kings; but when peace returns, I am no more than the son of Zebedeha, the Negro slave! How should I be able to endure these insults, were I not supported by the love that inflames me? O Abla! may thy image continue to console and animate me! If thy abode were in the heavens to-morrow, this arm should invade the stars to merit and complete thy conquest!"

Once, after a long march through the desert, Antar, accompanied by a few horsemen of Zobeir, attacked

Digitized by Google

the tribe of Cathan, the hereditary enemies of the tribe of Abs. He slew their bravest warriors, overthrew their tents, and drove before him, as prizes, their slaves and flocks, constituting altogether a rich plunder, which raised his fortune to an equality with that of the most opulent amongst the shepherds of Arabia. But the instinct of the hero overpowered in his lofty soul the desire and pride of wealth. He exchanged this entire spoil for a famous Persian charger, known throughout the desert by the name of *Abjer*. In vain his associates reproached him with having deprived them of their lawful share of the booty for a horse, which might be their property as well as his. Antar, treating their murmurs with contempt, braced up the girths of Abjer, and defied them all to battle. His majestic height, the steadiness of his deportment, the muscles of his arms resembling the knots on the handle of a mace, caused them to reflect and hesitate. They surrendered to him without contest the exclusive right over Abjer, who became, from that day forward, associated in history with all the dangers and triumphs of his rider and possessor. The anger of Schedad yielded entirely to this new proof of the unrivalled prowess of his son. He never wearied of gazing on him, and continually repeated his merits to his kindred. "Oh, my brother!" one day exclaimed Schedad to Malek, the father of Abla, "our enemies detest my son, because they have none who resemble him! No, by the God of Moses and Abraham, neither in the east nor the west can a warrior be found to compare with

Digitized by Google

Antar when mounted on Abjer!" Thus speaking, Schedad kissed the eyes of Antar. "If thou lovest me," he continued, addressing his brother Malek, "love also my son Antar." "Brother," cunningly replied Malek, the father of Abla, but the secret enemy of Antar, because he disapproved of and dreaded his pretensions to his daughter,—"brother, what thou sayest is true: thou art the column of our tents, and Antar is our sword!"

A festival took place in the tent of Malek, at which Abla and her brothers were present. Antar rejoiced in the pardon of his father, the praises of his uncle, the friendship of his cousins, and the love of Abla, who was a witness of his glory. He was clothed in a vest of gold brocade, and a pelisse of honour, which the King Zobeir had presented to him as a reward for his service in the field. There was no garment comparable to his in all the tribe. Amrou, the brother of Abla, looked on it with envy, and pledging Antar in many mutual cups of wine, Antar disrobed himself of his rich covering, and gave it to his cousin, to render him favourable to his love. "Nephew," said the father of Abla, while thanking Antar for the present he had bestowed upon his son, "Abla is thy slave, I am thy slave, and Amrou is the slave of thy sandals!"

The credulous Antar, transported with joy at these words, stripped himself forthwith of all his arms and remaining vestments, even of his shirt, retaining only his ample trousers, and prostrating his naked bust before the feet of his uncle, kissed his knees, and prayed

Digitized by Google

him to accept all that he possessed, in grateful return for the promise he had made him. Antar then raised himself majestically. "Abla," says the poet, "seeing Antar thus standing before her, black and shining as a mass of ebony, and looking on the scars and cicatrices with which repeated blows of lance and sabre had furrowed his body and arms, was struck with astonishment, and laughed with joy as she contemplated the strength and lofty stature of her cousin." Antar, feeling wounded by the unseemly mirth of his mistress, reflected for a moment, and then replied in these extemporaneous verses: "The fair and delicate Abla smiles as she surveys my dark hue, and observes the traces of the lance-heads on my body. Thou wouldst cease to laugh, O Abla, if thou couldst behold me surrounded by a host of enemies;—if thou couldst perceive my lance piercing their hearts, and the flowing of the purple blood which invariably follows! I am then the lion of the desert, and I marvel that any enemy should be able to endure the aspect of my features and survive his terror." Fresh garments were then supplied to Antar, in which he clothed himself; and thus he remained nine days in the tent of his uncle, feasting, drinking, and discoursing with his beloved Abla. On the tenth day, his uncle Malek having called Antar into his presence, demanded of him what were his intentions with regard to his daughter, and what dowry he proposed to give him in exchange for Abla. "Oh, my uncle," replied the young lover, "far be from me the shame of fixing the

Digitized by Google

value of that countenance radiant with light; of that shape which excels the palm-tree; of that pearl of the ocean; of that immaculate virgin, enveloped in her modesty! Name yourself what you desire, and let it be a portion exceeding that which all the kings and all the warriors of Arabia and Persia combined would be unable to bestow!" Malek demanded of him one thousand camels of the race of *Acefyr*, the most rare and highly esteemed amongst all the tribes. Antar promised them to him, loaded moreover with all the riches of their masters. He then departed in a thoughtful mood from the tent of his uncle, to proceed on the accomplishment of his promise, and thus to pay the purchase-money of Abla.

The same evening, accompanied only by his brother Cheioub, he arrived in front of a solitary tent of black goats' hair, round which a few meagre camels were grazing here and there. An old man came forth, attracted by the sound of their horses' feet. His form was bent beneath the weight of many days; time and misery had wasted him to a skeleton. "This aged man," said the poet, in describing their meeting, "walked with his face inclining towards the ground, and his beard descended to his knees. 'Why dost thou stoop thus as thou goest along?' said I, addressing him. He replied, extending one hand towards me, 'My youth has been lost on the earth, and I bend downwards as ever seeking to recover it there.'"

Antar dismounted at the door of the tent. His horse Abjer was loaded with the game which he had killed

Digitized by Google

as he passed along. The old man kindled a fire, and prepared a repast. They continued eating and drinking until night fell. The hermit having demanded of the young warrior the object of his expedition, Antar related the promise he had given to his uncle. "May Heaven confound thy uncle!" exclaimed the ancient recluse, "for he has compassed thy death in exacting from thee such a dowry for his daughter. These camels are only to be found within the territories of the King Moundhir, which are situated between Arabia and Persia, and his power is equally dreaded by Persians and Arabians. Thou art about to cast thyself into a fire, the flame of which will never be extinguished." "There is neither force nor power but in God alone, who knows everything," replied Antar, somewhat alarmed, but still determined to persevere in his design. "Have I said yes to my uncle, and shall I now retract my promise, and tell him no? That shall never be, even though I am destined to become as a pasture to the savage animals of the wilderness!"

Antar slept under the tent of the hermit, and on the following morning, with the first gleam of light, he pursued the road to Irak, a province of Persia, subject to King Moundhir. The description which he has given in his verses of the land of Irak, reveals the power of a poet who paints with a glowing pencil. "There," he says, "were presented to my eyes many houses, filled like beehives, vast meadows, gardens brilliant with flowers, and watered by gushing fountains; Arabian chargers, of different colours, bounding

Digitized by Google

across the plains like the waves of the sea agitated by the morning breeze; they gladdened the surrounding country, and made the leaves of the trees tremble at their neighing. There were also young camels with their mothers, dromedaries rapid as the dust flying before the wind, slaves, young lads, and black damsels with curling hair. There we discovered a valley, the most fertile and smiling that had ever been embellished by friendly Genii; water flowed through it in all directions, pure and translucent as liquid silver; the perfumes of the grass spread abroad the odour of musk; thousands of feathered songsters, nightingales, thrushes, blackbirds, ringdoves, partridges, quails, and turtle-doves, sang in the plains or perched upon the boughs; the pea-hens exhibited the splendour of their trains, as if the Creator had exhausted on them his most brilliant colours, and had poured over them the coral and the hyacinth." *

Antar recognised, by these evidences of power and wealth, that the old recluse had told him the truth, and that to bear away the flocks and treasures of a kingdom so well defended, was an enterprise above the strength of a single warrior. Nevertheless, he retained his usual hardihood, and, willing to combine stratagem with force, he dismounted, unbridled Abjer, and sent his brother Cheioub, the Ulysses of Arabia, under the disguise of a slave, to mingle with the serfs who watched the flocks; and to obtain from them, in frank conversation, such particulars as he required touching the

* Translation of M. Dugat.

Digitized by Google

far-famed camels of the race of Acefyr, which Antar desired to carry off as the dowry of Abla.

Cheioub acquitted himself of his mission with his natural dexterity. Well received by the slaves of King Moundhir, he ate and drank with them, and induced them to point out to him the camels of which he was in search. He recognised without difficulty, by the whiteness of their hair, the graceful undulation of their humps, and the rounded smoothness of their hind-quarters, that they were the pride and wonder of the entire herd. Escaping while the slaves were asleep, he rejoined Antar, and related what he had beheld. "Never," said he, "were droves of cattle so carefully defended, and thy uncle has doomed us to certain death in putting this enterprise upon us." "It signifies not," replied Antar; "brace up the girths of Abjer, and give me mine armour of iron mail." "Mounted on his charger," says the poet, "he resembled a strong tower."

The hour arrived when the slaves brought back the herds to graze in the valley. Each troop of one thousand camels was guarded by ten attendants. These, as they passed by, scarcely bestowed a glance on Antar and his brother, so much were they accustomed to see strangers without fear, in a land into which no plunderer had ever entered with impunity. But Antar, drawing his sabre from the scabbard, and impelling his courser as a thunderbolt bursts from the cloud, upon the unsuspecting group, dispersed them in astonishment and terror, seized a thousand camels of the race of Acefyr

Digitized by Google

from amongst the ten thousand of meaner worth belonging to the king, and commanded ten slaves who had cast themselves prostrate upon the earth, to rise and drive the spoil before him.

But the chief of the slaves, having rallied one hundred of these terror-stricken guardians, who had in some measure recovered their self-possession, endeavoured to protect the royal flocks, and advanced at the head of his companions towards the ravisher. Antar struck him with his naked sword upon the nape of the neck, and the blade issued forth at his throat. "Shame be to thy mother and to the mother of thy king, Moundhir!" exclaimed the infuriated hero. Antar and Cheioub wearied themselves with the slaughter of these faithful slaves, and then drove the herd of plundered camels before them into the desert.

Meanwhile Homan, the son of King Moundhir, an intrepid warrior, apprised of what had happened by the cries of the shepherds, collected a thousand horsemen, and darted off in pursuit, to obtain vengeance. Antar turned and paused, on hearing the noise of their approach at full gallop behind him. "Raising himself fiercely in his saddle," says the poem, "with a smile of pride and defiance on his lips, he waited their approach as the parched earth thirsts for the rain." The terrible war-shout that he uttered astounded the advancing foe, and compelled their coursers to halt in trepidation. "How!" exclaimed the indignant Homan, observing the hesitation of his companions, "do ye tremble thus before a miserable Negro slave?" A desperate combat

Digitized by Google

followed, which lasted until darkness fell. Antar, exhausted by a struggle incessantly renewed, loads the earth in vain with the bodies of men and horses; his arm begins to fail. Abjer reels and sinks beneath his master, and finally extricating himself, and forcing a passage through his enemies, flies off to the remote desert, and leaves his master on foot, overthrown, helpless, surrounded, and covered with blood. Cheioub, who looked on from a distance, seeing his brother Antar fall, galloped off with his utmost speed towards the desert, outstripped his pursuers, and arrived alone at the entrance of a cavern hollowed out on the side of a mountain. Here he found a young man of a tawny and sunburnt complexion, who tended sheep and goats while they were browsing. A small fire burned before him, on which he was roasting a morsel of kid.

"Youth!" exclaimed Cheioub, addressing him, "protect me; I surrender myself up to thee; I claim thy hospitality. My death is imminent, and those who have slain my brother are close in pursuit." "By heaven!" answered the young shepherd, "I will protect thee against all who eat bread and drink water. Enter the cavern, for they shall slay me before I deliver thee up to them." Scarcely had the shepherd uttered his generous oath, when the horsemen of King Moundhir, who followed Cheioub, and had perceived from a distance how he hid himself in the cavern, arrived, and demanded of the shepherd to deliver up his guest, whom by the customs of the country they were forbidden to kill under the roof of his protector.

Digitized by Google

"Make him come forth," exclaimed they, "or we will slay thee in his place!" "Noble Arabs!" replied the shepherd, "do not, I beseech you, violate the faith I have sworn to this fugitive. Remove to a distance of forty paces from the door of the cavern, that I may assume the right of withdrawing my protection, and you shall then be free to work your will upon him." "Let it be so," answered the warriors, and immediately they drew off to the prescribed distance.

"Stranger!" said the shepherd to Cheioub, returning to the cavern, "thou hast heard all; nothing can redeem thy life but mine, but I prefer sacrificing myself to failing in the hospitality which I have vowed to thee. Put off thy garments, assume mine, go forth and say to the cavaliers, 'The stranger refuses to quit his asylum, do as you desire with him; I yield him up to you.' Then, when thou seest them dismount from their horses to enter the cavern, fly with thy utmost speed amongst the rocks, and leave them to revenge thy escape at my expense! Here are my provisions and a bag; take this staff, and may the darkness of night be propitious unto thee!" Cheioub clothed himself in the vestments of the shepherd, took the staff in his hand, and issued from the cavern. The shadows of approaching night concealed his face. He said to the surrounding horsemen what had been determined on, pretended to collect his sheep to drive them before him, and disappeared amongst the rocks.

The horsemen of King Moundhir dismounted, entered the cavern, and dragged forth the young shepherd.

Digitized by Google

They brought him forward to examine his features by the light of the fire, and recognized with rage and disappointment that he was the shepherd disguised under the garments of Cheioub. "Evil be to thee!" they cried aloud as they drew their sabres, "why hast thou deceived us and exposed thyself to death to save a stranger, the vilest miscreant in Arabia?" "I preferred," answered the shepherd with unshaken resolution, "to purchase with my own life the safety of his, which I had sworn to defend. Do with me as you will." The warriors, struck with admiration of his virtue, pardoned and overwhelmed him with praises. They then suffered him to depart, covered with glory, and worthy of immortal honour.

During the flight of his brother, Antar continued to combat on foot against the cloud of enemies that surrounded him. Exhaustion, and not wounds, finally subdued him, and cast him fainting on the earth, with his face downwards. Seized and tightly bound with cords, he was dragged in the dust to the feet of Homan, the king's son. The manly and undaunted bearing of the hero, his terrible aspect, the loftiness of his stature, and the breadth of his chest, astonished the young prince. "Bind him more closely," said he to the guards; "fasten him upon the back of a horse, and bring him to the presence of the king, that he himself may decide upon his fate!"

"Who art thou?" demanded the monarch, who at that moment returned from the chase, surrounded by his courtiers.

Digitized by Google

"I am an Arab, of the tribe of Abs," replied Antar.

"Art thou of the race of their nobles, or of their slaves?" continued the king

"Prince!" rejoined Antar, "amongst men of generous minds, true nobility consists in the shock of lances, the whistling of arrows, the blows of sharp sabres upon tempered breastplates, and in patience on the battle-field. I am the physician of the tribe of Abs when they are sick, their protector when they are in danger, the defender of their women when they are in flight, their champion when they are proud of their glory, and their sabre when they hurry to the battle."

The king, astonished by this poetic eloquence from the mouth of a black slave, demanded of Antar, who had incited him to invade his territories and carry off his camels? Antar confessed that he was instigated by his love for his cousin Abla, and the cunning demand of his uncle Malek, who had named this achievement as the price of his daughter's hand. The king marvelled how, with all this courage, eloquence, poetry, and elevation of sentiment, he should thus expose himself to destruction for a little Arab girl. "O mighty sovereign!" replied Antar, "it is Love which urges the warrior to mount his charger and rush into the foremost peril; Love causes the heads of the bravest to roll in the dust: he only rewards those of his votaries who have tasted the bitterness of absence after the delights of a return, and who have watched without impatience or interval through the longest nights! Misfortune occurs everywhere from the glance

Digitized by Google

which issues from behind the folds of a female veil."

A sudden noise and tumult interrupted the conversation. Messengers announced to King Moundhir that a lion larger than a bull, provoked by the hunters, had fallen furiously upon his attendants, and was scattering death and carnage wherever he approached. "King!" exclaimed Antar, "order your people to leave me alone to combat with this lion: if he kills me, you will be avenged, for I have already slain many of your warriors and slaves; but if I vanquish him, give me in reward my life and liberty. Unbind only my hands, and leave my feet in their shackles, for then I shall either kill the wild animal, or I shall be unable to fly into the desert before him."

The lion was subdued. Antar, in hurling him to the ground, uttered but a single cry of triumph: "I am always the lover of Abla!" Then striking up a song of victory, mingled with complaints of his evil fortune, he detailed in heroic measure his misfortunes, his defeat, and his captivity. "I have been brought into the presence of a generous monarch,"—thus ran the last verses of the song; "I have fought with a lion fierce to look on and terrible to engage; his visage was as broad as a buckler, and his eyeballs darted forth sparks brilliant and fierce as the lights of heaven; I have cloven him with a single blow of my sabre, and with my feet confined by bonds. I hope therefore that the King will grant me in recompense the dowry of Abla demanded by my uncle, the camels of Acefyr!"

Digitized by Google

"By the sacred firmament!" exclaimed the King, listening with admiration to the words of Antar, "this black slave is the wonder of the age and the paragon of the world; he unites heroism with eloquence, and boldness to constancy in great difficulties, such as appal and subdue the spirits of ordinary men. If I can attach him to myself, I shall then through his prowess demonstrate the superiority of the Arabs of my race over the Persians of King Chosroes, whose tributary I am." Then turning to the guards, he added, "Retain this Negro as a prisoner in my court, for the earth contains not his equal, and he may one day glorify the hand that spares him." From that moment Antar was treated with all the respect and indulgence compatible with captivity.

A short time after, Moundhir having brought his tribute to Chosroes, the great King of Persia, was invited by that monarch to a grand festival. The courtiers of Chosroes, wishing to ridicule the simplicity of the shepherd-monarch, set upon his table two baskets of dates exactly similar in appearance: but the dates served up to Chosroes and the Persian courtiers were scooped out, and the stone replaced by pistachio nuts and honey; those placed before Moundhir were veritable dates, with the fruit surrounding the kernel. King Moundhir, observing that Chosroes and his nobles ate of these pretended dates without rejecting the stone, felt himself bound through respect to imitate his sovereign; he therefore swallowed the kernel with the dates. Chosroes and his attendants burst out into im-

Digitized by Google

moderate laughter. Moundhir inquired the cause, and they confessed the trick which had been put upon him. The offended guest affected to join in the mirth at his own expense; but he retired deeply stung by the trick practised on his simple credulity, and meditating plans of revenge. On returning to his mountainous sovereignty, he addressed a letter of complaint and defiance to the King of Persia, reproaching him with his inhospitable conduct. The King, upon this, despatched an army to reduce Moundhir to subjection. On the approach of the Persian forces, Moundhir began to feel that he had gone too far. "I perceive," said he, "that my letter has offended Chosroes; my words were out of season. The lightness of the tongue produces the calamities of man."

A satrap named Kosrouân, an enemy of King Moundhir, and who aspired to the possession of his lands, commanded the army of the Persian monarch; having won the first battle, he laid siege to the city of Herà, the metropolis and refuge of the vanquished. Moundhir, reduced to extremity, called together his sons and warriors to a grand military council. It was determined to make a desperate sortie, sabre in hand; to surround their women, children, and treasures with a rampart of steel; to seek refuge in the desert, and to demand an asylum, with succour and the means of vengeance, from the wandering Arabs who dwelt and ruled there. When the king's slaves who guarded Antar were apprised of this resolution to expatriate himself and people, they threw themselves at the feet of their

Digitized by Google

master. "Father!" they cried, "the captive warrior of the tribe of Abs who is consigned to our care, hearing the tumult in the city this morning, and having questioned us as to the cause, we informed him of what was passing round the walls. 'Lead me to the King!' he replied; "I will reveal to him a plan by which he shall destroy his enemies, even though they were as numerous as the grains of sand in the desert.'" Antar was forthwith conducted to the royal presence. "By heaven!" he exclaimed, "my liver was ready to burst with rage and shame when I heard that Arabs had fled before those dogs of Persians! The Arabs," he continued, "are enduring in combat, and die under their horses' hoofs, but they cannot bear the disgrace of saving themselves by flight. Promise me the dowry demanded by my uncle: give me back my sabre, my horse Abjer, and my cuirass; lend me one thousand warriors of the army to execute the manœuvre which I shall point out to them, and you shall soon see what will become of your enemies."

The King, confiding in the strength and courage of his prisoner, consented to all he desired, and called his warriors to arms. Antar then raised his battle-song: "I will plunge," said he, "into the cloud of dust until I encounter the satrap Kosrouân, and speedily will I compel him to drink the draught of death! He shall taste upon the blade of my sabre a beverage after which water shall never again pass within his lips." Having finished his verses, "For thy eyes, O Abla!" exclaimed he, and fell upon the Persians. "His lance," says the

Digitized by Google

poet, "was like destiny, and cut asunder the thread of many lives." Such an example restored courage to the thousand horsemen of Moundhir, who, under such irresistible leadership, drove back the Persians far from the walls of the city. Kosrouân, who had stationed himself with the rearguard, ascertained from the scattered fugitives the flight of his army before a black warrior, more impetuous and sweeping, as they declared, than the simoom. He vowed to engage this formidable champion himself on the following day, and to wash out in his blood the shame of defeat. King Moundhir, on the other hand, hastened to meet Antar, conducted him to his tent, and invited him to feast in his company. "If I could think," said he to the young conqueror of the Persians, "that it would be agreeable to thee to remain in our country, I would send and induce Abla to come hither, either of her own free will or by force; but I fear that thy heart breathes only for thine own country, and the tents in which thou wert born!"

"Master," replied Antar, "I have not sufficient courage to remain here. Every day passes over me with the weight of a thousand years; nevertheless, though I should die of my love, and melt in the fierce heat of my remembrances and regrets, I will not depart until thou hast taken ample vengeance upon Kosrouân." They passed the night under the tent in discoursing of the battle of the following morn, while the King's sons watched over the security of the Arabian camp.

Digitized by Google

Kosrouân, on his part, vowed to his chiefs that on the following morning he would slay this invincible Genie disguised under the figure of a Negro, and he slept tranquilly in the confidence of his approaching triumph. "At the first dawn of day," says the poem, "a warrior issued from the Arabian ranks, and advanced into the open space which divided them from the Persians. He was enveloped in his coat of mail; a sabre hung suspended from his belt; in his hand he carried a long lance; he was mounted on a mare of yellow colour, glittering as gold exposed to the sun, and of a rare perfection, such as had never before been looked upon; her sinews were strong, her long tail imprinted a furrow as it trailed in the dust; she was the pride of all the coursers of Arabia, rapid as the wind that flies, brilliant as the lightning that destroys, terrible as the storm that overthrows. The warrior she carried made her bound and curvet on either side of the plain, to calm down her fire, and temper her impatience. The Persians of the night-watch recognized him, and trembled at the sight. It was Antar, the son of Schedad. His mare belonged to the stud of King Moundhir, who had lent her to him because Abjer, worn out and wounded on the preceding day, required tending and repose. Antar, finding his mare to be valiant in spirit and eager for the combat, galloped forward, and defied Kosrouân in extemporaneous verses.

"Kosrouân, stung by the insult, threw himself upon a Persian horse with a mouth so delicate that by the

Digitized by Google

slightest touch of the hand he penetrated the thought of his master. His breast was covered by a cuirass of mailed plates, small and delicate as the eyes of grasshoppers; javelins hung suspended upon his thigh, his quiver was filled with arrows, and a mace, pointed with iron, balanced lightly as a feather in his right hand. The two warriors fell upon each other; a cloud of dust, raised by the hoofs of their encountering chargers, concealed them from the view of both armies. Their blows were heard, while the combatants were hidden like a double thunder-storm under a single cloud. Kosrouân, after some time, broke forth from this whirlpool, attacking Antar with javelins, which the Arab parried and cast aside with his lance. At length the Persian, profiting by a movement of Antar which left his head exposed, launched his enormous mace, the weight of which already in his imagination crushed to the earth both man and horse; but Antar, anticipating the blow, received the mace in his wide grasp, grappled it firmly by the chain, caused it to whirl round as a child manages a sling, and, casting it back with all his strength upon Kosrouân, extended him upon the dust, crushed and lifeless. He was dead without being sensible to the taste of death!"

On the fall of their most renowned warrior and satrap, the Persians fled, pursued and slaughtered by the victorious Arabs. A single arm had decided the contest. The name of Antar resounded from the lips of all. He returned in triumph at the head of the warriors of Moundhir, his armour clotted with blood.

Digitized by Google

Moundhir received him as his preserver, gave him the thousand Acefyr camels, and despatched an ambassador to the tribe of Abs to conduct Abla to her hero, and to celebrate their nuptials in the capital. He required only that Antar should not leave his territories until he had reconciled himself with Chosroes, his liege lord, to whom he repented of having given offence. An opportunity of making up the quarrel soon presented itself.

A Roman warrior, to whom the Arabian poet has assigned the barbarous name of Bathramouth, had recently arrived at the court of Chosroes, with the view of converting the Persian Empire to the Christian faith, which at that time began to spread throughout the East. This Bathramouth, half apostle and half soldier, had performed prodigies of strength and address, which humiliated the followers of the great King. Sixty times had he vanquished the most celebrated cavaliers of Persia in single combats in the royal presence; and now, inflamed by pride and success, defied to fresh trials all the chosen heroes of Iran and Arabia. A wise vizier, more than one hundred years of age, counselled Chosroes to seek renewed amity with his former ally, Moundhir, and to invite him to his court with a select band of the most intrepid horsemen of the desert, amongst whom perchance Bathramouth might discover a worthy rival, and the honour of the crown a suitable avenger.

Moundhir arrived, accompanied by Antar mounted upon Abjer. After a desperate combat of five hours in

Digitized by Google

the lists, Antar slew Bathramouth in the presence of both the kings. Persia triumphed over Rome by the arm of a black slave. Chosroes presented to Antar the spoils of the vanquished champion, and admitted him to his most costly banquet before he dismissed Moundhir. The effeminate luxury of the Persian table astonished the sober Arab of the desert. "Oh, master!" he exclaimed to King Moundhir, "are these numerous and different viands those which the kings of Persia partake of daily, or are they the delicacies reserved for the fixed annual festivals? I do not perceive amongst them the flesh of the camel, and these light aliments are fit only for children!"

Moundhir, in explanation, made his champion blush at his simplicity and ignorance. He partook freely of what was served up to the guests, and drank of cups filled with wine as old as the world itself. Beautiful Greek slaves of the household of Bathramouth poured out the liquor and presented the goblets; they were clothed in robes of many colours, and resembled the rising moon. Having been informed that Antar was thenceforth their master, they approached respectfully to wait upon him, and to anticipate his slightest wishes, whether he rose or sat, and to discover his thoughts in his eyes; but Antar turned away from these tempting damsels: the love of Abla alone reigned in his heart.

"Why," said King Moundhir, addressing him when the fumes of the wine had begun to unsettle his imagination, and repeated libations had invaded his

Digitized by Google

reason,—"why dost thou not take delight in these beautiful slaves, and why is thy heart not filled with thy exaltation and glory? Dost thou covet a rank even more exalted, and canst thou conceive in thy own land aught that can surpass this night of splendour? Cast aside all sad reflections, and seize the moment of enjoyment. To-day thou hast placed thyself on a level with the kings of the earth; and if the most powerful of thy tribe beheld thee, they would envy thy lot."

Antar, on listening to these words, sighed heavily, and ill-restrained tears trickled down his cheeks, as his thoughts reverted to his own country. "By thy head, which I venerate so much," replied he to the King, "these favours and distinctions have neither value nor charm for me; my feelings and my thoughts are in another country, and thou knowest that our native land is the jewel of our hearts, and above all when we have left there the mistress of our choice. Separated from her, I dream that her phantom visits me in my sleep, and that the soft breezes of Arabia blow towards me."

Then, rising into enthusiasm at the image of Abla thus conjured up before him, he burst into the following verses:—

"The freshness of the morning air which breathes from Yemen, when I inhale its aromatic odour, affords me more pleasure than all these pearls, these wonders and treasures heaped together under my hand. The empire of King Chosroes has no temptation for me

Digitized by Google

when the image of my well-beloved is no longer present to my eyes!" "Demand of me what thou wilt" said King Chosroes, "and that which appears the most valuable in thy sight of all the treasures of my empire, I swear to grant it to thee in recompense of the service thou hast rendered me, in vindicating the honour of Arabia and Persia against this champion of the Romans."

Antar requested Chosroes to bestow upon him the coronet of jewels which glittered upon his forehead, that he might place it upon the brow of Abla on the day of their nuptials; and that night he slept with the diadem by his side. The King added to this gift a stool, or portable throne, on which the Arabian females of high rank were accustomed to place their feet on dismounting from their camels. The fêtes, the hunting parties, and the wrestlings continued for several days, at the close of which Antar took leave of the sovereign of Persia, and departed with the good King Moundhir to take possession of the thousand Acefyr camels which that faithful protector had presented to him, to convey them to his uncle Malek. Upon these animals were heaped the trophies conquered by Antar from his adversaries in fight, with the crown, and also with the throne destined by Chosroes for Abla. King Moundhir added fifty saddle-horses, magnificently caparisoned, a hundred female slaves of exquisite beauty, and fifty male slaves, selected from amongst the most robust and most elegantly-formed of the inhabitants of the mountains.

Digitized by Google

Antar set out for the desert attended by his escort, the slaves driving before him the long train of camels, loaded with treasure. He felt intoxicated with joy at his happiness and triumph; but the excess of his impatience to see Abla again, and the fervour of his love, threw him into a fit of sickness. He inhaled powerfully the breeze which came from the high lands of Yemen, thinking only of the happiness of reappearing in presence of his tribe in such a flow of prosperity, of dazzling Abla with his splendour, his glory, and the recital of his unparalleled exploits. The report of his death, spread abroad by his brother Cheioub, had mortally wounded the heart of his beloved: she recovered life and beauty on beholding the features of Antar.

Malek, his uncle, vanquished by this triumphant return, yielded up to him his daughter. The black slave, enriched by the presents of Moundhir and Chosroes, became the most powerful and the richest chieftain of the tribe of Abs. Years rolled on in alternations of peace and war, in new acts of heroism, and in an unvarying flow of happiness in the society of the lovely Abla, the envy of all the matrons of Hedjaz and Yemen. We pass over this monotonous portion of the life of the hero, to arrive at his death, as described in one of the most exquisite lyric poems of any language. In the progress of his exploits as chief of his tribe, Antar had vanquished an enemy named Djezzar, and, to punish him for his unprovoked aggressions, had deprived him of sight by passing a red-hot sabre close to his eyes. After this punishment he gave

Digitized by Google

him his life and liberty, and suffered him even to retain the supreme rank over his people.

"Ever since that time," says the writer, who continues the poem, which relates with the same tongue the funeral song and heroic death of Antar (we borrow for the occasion the learned and picturesque translation of M. Caussin de Perceval)—"ever since that time, Djezzar, the son of Djaber, brooded over his vengeance in silence. Although the light of his eyes was quenched, he had lost nothing of his skill in archery; his ear, accustomed to follow the movements of wild animals by the sound of their steps, was sufficiently acute to guide his hand; his arrow never missed the mark. His hatred, ever alive, listened greedily to the intelligence which rumour spread abroad as to the proceedings of his enemy. He ascertained that Antar, after a distant and successful expedition against the frontiers of Persia, was, on his return to Yemen, loaded with as much glory and treasure as he had formerly carried home from the court of Chosroes, and that he intended to pass near his encampment. On receiving this news, Djezzar shed tears of envy and rage. He called to him Nedjim, his faithful slave. 'Ten years have rolled on,' he said, 'since the burning iron ordered by Antar has deprived me of sight, and I am not yet avenged! but the moment has at length arrived to extinguish in his blood the fire which consumes my heart. Antar is encamped, they say, on the banks of the Euphrates; thither will I go to seek him. I will conceal myself in the rushes of the river until Heaven shall deliver his life into my hands.'"

Digitized by Google

Djezzar ordered his slave to lead forth a camel which outstripped the ostrich in its speed; he then armed himself with his quiver filled with poisoned arrows. Nedjim compelled the camel to kneel, assisted his master to mount, and took the halter of the camel to direct its steps towards the distant bed of the Euphrates. The blind warrior filled the desert with his menaces and complaints.

After a long day's march over a plain without water, Djezzar and his attendant arrived at the banks of the Euphrates, the course of which was marked by a line of stately trees and brilliant verdure. "What dost thou perceive on the opposite bank?" demanded Djezzar of his slave. Nedjim cast a glance on the other side: he saw a camp richly adorned, numerous herds of cattle, camels wandering in groups over the plain, lances planted in the earth at the entrances of the tents, and caparisoned horses fastened by their feet to the habitations of their masters. A tent more brilliant and lofty than the rest was erected at a small distance from the river; before the entrance a long steel lance was planted like a mast, and near it stood a courser more shining and black than ebony itself. Nedjim recognized at once the noble war-horse of Antar, the far-famed Abjer, and the formidable lance of the hero: he halted the camel of his master behind the shrubs and canes which concealed them from human observation, and waited the approach of darkness.

No sooner had night covered with her shadow the

Digitized by Google

banks of the Euphrates, than the blind Djezzar said to his slave: "Let us quit this spot; the voices which I hear seem too distant for the range of my arrows. Bring me nearer to the brink of the stream: my heart tells me that a great blow will speedily immortalize my name and vengeance." Nedjim took the blind chieftain by the hand, placed him close to the water's edge, and handed to him his bow and quiver. Djezzar selected the sharpest of his arrows, fixed it in the string, and with attentive ear waited the hour of retribution. Meanwhile Antar, reclining in the arms of Abla, his beloved spouse, his love for whom had suffered no abatement after ten years of possession, forgot beneath his tent the fatigues and exploits of the day; when suddenly the mournful barking of the dogs, the faithful guardians of the camp, impressed his mind with prophetic inquietude. He rose and went forth from the tent; the heavens were sombre and cloudy; he wandered in the darkness with uncertain steps; the noise of the dogs led him towards the Euphrates. Carried on by his destiny, he advanced even to the bed of the river, and suspecting the presence of a stranger on the opposite bank, called loudly to his brother to rise and reconnoitre. Scarcely had the sound of his deep voice, issuing from the hollow valley in which he stood, been repeated by the mountain echoes, when an arrow pierced his right side and penetrated to his entrails. No cry, no groan unworthy of a hero escaped him in his agony, as he endeavoured to wrench away the iron with a strong hand. "Traitor! who hast not

Digitized by Google

dared to attack me in open daylight," exclaimed he with a firm tone, addressed to his invisible enemy, "thou shalt not escape from my arm; thou shalt reap the fruit of thy treachery." Hearing these words, which induced him to think that his arrow had missed its mark, the blind Djezzar, struck with terror at the apprehended vengeance of Antar, fainted upon the shore; and his slave, believing that he was dead, mounted the camel to save himself by flight, and abandoned his inanimate master to his fate. The brother of Antar swam across the river, stumbled against a body which he took for a corpse, and carried it back to the camp on his shoulders, together with the bow and arrows.

Antar, stretched in his tent in the midst of his astounded friends, suffered the most horrible tortures. The tender Abla stanched his blood, and bathed the wound with her tears. The body of the murderer and his weapons were brought in; Antar recognized the mutilated countenance of his enemy, and at once felt convinced that an arrow launched from that hand must be a poisoned one. Hope fled from his heart, and inevitable death presented itself before his eyes. "Son of my uncle!" said Abla to him in a tone of soft affection, "why abandon hope? Should a slight hurt from an arrow cause alarm to a warrior who has borne without shrinking so many wounds from sabres and lances, the marks of which entirely cover his body?" "Abla," replied Antar, "my days are numbered. Behold these features!—they are those of Djezzar. The arrow of the

Digitized by Google

traitor is poisoned!" At these words the sighs of Abla pierced the darkness of the night; she tore her garments and her long tresses, and gathered the dust to heap it upon her head. All her women joined in these sad demonstrations of woe. "Beloved partner!" said Antar to Abla, "who will defend thy honour and thy life after the death of Antar, throughout the long journey thou hast still to accomplish before thou canst reach the territory of thy father? A second husband, another Antar, can alone enable thee to escape the horrors of impending slavery. Of all the warriors of the desert, Zeid and Amrem are the two whose courage will the most effectually secure thy life and liberty. Choose one of these, and promise him thy hand." Abla replied only by tears to a thought which drove her to despair.

"To reach the land inhabited by the children of Abs, to secure thy passage across the intervening desert, clothe thee in my garments and armour, and mount my war-horse Abjer. Under this disguise, which will lead our enemies to believe that I live still, thou needest not dread attack. Answer not those who salute thee on the march; the sight of the arms and courser of Antar will suffice to intimidate the most intrepid." After these words, Antar ordered the departure of his camp. The tents were struck, folded, and placed upon the camels. Abla, inundated by her tears, suffered herself, in passive obedience, to be arrayed in the mighty armour of Antar. Girt with his sabre, and carrying his lance in her right hand, she

Digitized by Google

mounted his war-horse Abjer, while the slaves carried the expiring Antar in the litter used by Abla in happier times, when she crossed the desert with the state of a queen. Scarcely had they quitted the verdant banks of the Euphrates to plunge into the immensity of the desert, when they perceived, at a distance, tents resembling dark spots on the horizon, or a black fringe on the azure mantle of the heavens: it was the encampment of a numerous, powerful, and hostile tribe. Three hundred horsemen detached themselves from it to fall on the caravan; but as they approached, they recognized the litter and the horse. "It is Antar and Abla," they exclaimed in a low voice to each other. "Behold his armour, his horse Abjer, and the magnificent litter of his wife. Let us return to our tents, and not expose ourselves to the anger of these invincible warriors." Already had they turned their bridles, when an aged sheik, more reflective and penetrating than his younger companions, thus addressed them: "My cousins, it is indeed the lance of Antar, his casque, his armour, and his war-horse, whose colour resembles the blackest night; but the rider has neither his lofty figure nor his manly attitude. It is the stature and deportment of a timid woman, bending under the weight of the iron which bruises her tender limbs. Trust to my suspicions; Antar is either dead, or a mortal sickness prevents him from mounting his horse: it is Abla, who has assumed the arms of her husband to intimidate us, while the real Antar is in all probability lying on a bed of death in the litter of the females."

Digitized by Google

The horsemen, perceiving that there was a semblance of probability in the words of the old sheik, retraced their steps, and followed the caravan at a distance, but still not venturing on an open attack. Meanwhile, the delicate hand of Abla bent under the weight of the iron lance, which at length she was obliged to yield up to the brother of her husband, who rode by her side. Speedily the sun, reaching his middle course, so scorched the sand of the desert, that Abla, exhausted with agony of mind and fatigue of body, raised the vizor of her helmet to wipe away the perspiration which bathed her forehead. The eyes of the watchful enemies saw at once the fairness of her complexion. "It is not the black!" they exclaimed, and immediately spurred their horses at full speed in pursuit of the small escort of Antar. At the sound of galloping behind him, at the neighing of the advancing steeds, at the voice of Abla, who called upon his name, Antar, who lay half-dead in the litter, raised himself, showed his head between the curtains, and uttered for the last time his terrible war-cry, which made the boldest hearts tremble and shrink within themselves. At this shout, known throughout the desert, the manes of the horses bristled with terror, and they fled with their riders in uncontrolled dismay, "Woe! woe!" exclaimed the Arabs, the enemies of the tribe of Abs, "Antar still lives! This is a snare which he has laid for us, to ascertain who would be hardy enough after his decease to aspire to the possession of his wife and property." A small number only, still relying on the words of

Digitized by Google

their sheik, continued to follow the caravan at a respectful distance.

Antar, notwithstanding his increasing weakness, replaced Abla in the litter, and remounting Abjer, assumed his armour once more, and marched slowly by her side. At the close of day, they arrived at the entrance of a valley bordering on the territory of the tribe of Abs: this defile was called, the Valley of the Gazelles. Surrounded by inaccessible mountains, it could only be reached on the side of the desert by a narrow, winding path, through which three horsemen could with difficulty pass abreast. Antar, halting at the entrance of this pass, ordered the droves of cattle to enter first, and then the slaves with the camel that carried the litter of his beloved Abla. As soon as the whole caravan was placed in safety within the valley, he assumed his post alone as sentinel at the extremity of the defile, exactly opposite to the plain and the hostile Arabs, who followed his movements afar off. At this moment the agony of his wound became insupportable, and every step of his horse occasioned sufferings equal to the flames of hell. Death assumed dominion over his limbs, but still respected his intrepid soul. He turned his face towards his enemies, reined up his horse, planted his lance in the earth with the point downwards, and resting against the staff like a warrior in repose who is giving rest to his exhausted steed, he stood motionless at the mouth of the ravine. At this sight, the thirty warriors, who had until then pursued the track of his caravan, paused in hesitation at a dis-

Digitized by Google

tance of more than a hundred paces from the hero. "Antar," they whispered to each other, "has perceived that we follow his march; he waits there to destroy us. Let us profit by the approaching darkness to escape from his sabre, and rejoin our brethren!" But the old sheik, persisting in his first idea, again restrained them. "My cousins," uttered he in a low tone, "listen not to the dictates of fear. The immobility of Antar is the sleep of death. Can it be possible that you forget his impetuous courage? Did Antar ever wait the attack of an enemy? If he lived, would he not fall upon us as the vulture pounces on its prey? Advance boldly; or if you still fear to venture your lives against his sword, wait here at least until the morning breaks to enlighten your suspicions."

Half persuaded by the old man, the thirty cavaliers determined to remain where they were; but anxious and alarmed at the smallest cloud of dust which the wind raised round the feet of Abjer, they passed the entire night in the saddle, without suffering their eyes to close under the influence of slumber. At length the day began to light up the heavens, and to disperse the shadows which covered the desert. Antar still stood motionless, in the same attitude, at the entrance of the defile; his courser, obedient to his thoughts, even when he was no longer there in life, remained stationary by the side of his master.

The Persian warriors, astonished at this strange apparition, consulted together for a considerable time without coming to a decision. All outward appear-

Digitized by Google

ances seemed to indicate that Antar had ceased to live, nevertheless no one had sufficient boldness to advance and satisfy himself of the fact; such was the habitual terror which the presence of that hero had stamped upon their feelings. The old sheik determined to ascertain the truth by an experiment, before he retired or advanced. He dismounted from his mare, and pricking her with the point of his lance, drove her towards the entrance of the pass. Scarcely had she reached the edge of the desert, when the fiery Abjer, scenting the odour of a female, ran neighing towards the mare, which he perceived was without a rider. At the first bound of the horse, Antar, who had been retained in an erect position solely by the shaft of his lance, which gave way under his weight, fell like a tower, and the clash of his armour resounded through the defile. At this fall, and at the sound of a lifeless corpse sinking upon the earth, the thirty cavaliers flew round the body stretched at the feet of their horses. They saw, with bewildered astonishment, the dreaded warrior who had made Arabia tremble, lie motionless and helpless in the dust; and gazed with insatiable glances on his gigantic limbs and colossal stature. Abandoning the idea of an attack on the caravan of Abla, which by the stratagem of the expiring Antar had gained an entire night to reach the encampment of the tribe of Abs, the warriors contented themselves with despoiling the fallen chieftain of his arms, to bear them to their own people as a trophy conquered from the dead. Vainly they attempted to obtain possession

Digitized by Google

of his horse. The faithful and proud Abjer, after having snuffed his dead master to satisfy himself that he was no more, felt that never again would he find a rider worthy of crossing his back. With the rapidity of lightning he evaded all attempts to catch him, disappeared from the eyes of his intended but baffled captors, and buried himself for ever in the unbounded freedom of the desert. It was recorded that the old sheik, overpowered by the calamitous end of a hero who had signalized himself by such illustrious deeds, wept over his inanimate remains, and buried them in the sand with this funereal encomium :—"Glory to thee, undaunted warrior! who throughout thy life wert the pillar of thy tribe, and even after death hast saved thy brethren by the aspect of thy corpse and the terror of thy name! May thy soul flourish in eternal bliss, and may refreshing dews moisten the earth which witnessed thy last exploit!"

Such is the history of Antar; and such is the poem of which this renowned Arab—a shepherd, a warrior, and a bard—was at the same time the author and the hero.* This noble composition, often rising to an equality with Homer, Virgil, and Tasso, in many of its essential components, is recited to this day under the tents of the wandering tribes in the deserts of Damascus, Aleppo, and Bagdad, throughout the long night-

* Antar is not entirely new to the English reader. The celebrated romance entitled "Antar," by Asmai, has been translated by Terrick Hamilton, Esq., and was published some years since, in four volumes.—TRANSL.

Digitized by Google

watches of the camel-drivers, or during the halts of the caravans. Let us not despise or undervalue anything. If the literary poetry of a people is one of the national monuments by which posterity measures with a correct estimate the degree of moral and intellectual civilization to which that people as a body have arrived, let us admit also that these simple and pastoral races, who embellish their memories and beguile their leisure by the reading or recital of a traditional epic as pure and heroic as the poem of Antar, are at least equal in delicacy of taste and nobility of sentiment to the sedentary populations of the West, who combine pride with vulgarism, and whose highest poetic effusions consist of elegiac lamentations over illustrious criminals, or some cynical strophes illustrative of debauched habits, immorality, and intemperance. Between this poetry of the tavern and the desert, no honest heart or chaste imagination can hesitate as to which the palm of superiority belongs: the tent civilizes, while the wine-shop degrades.

The fact is, there are two classes of civilization, which must not be confounded: the material and mechanical, which acts upon matter and produces wealth; and the moral, which operates upon the soul, and deals with ideas, manners, heroism, and exalted virtue. We calculate the value of the first by what it produces—worldly possessions: we appreciate the latter by what it inspires—noble sentiments. The nations who are most truly civilized unite both; and to attain this end requires and demands the combined efforts of govern-

Digitized by Google

ments, legislators, political economists, moralists, writers, and poets. But if we were compelled to choose between these two conditions of civilization, often opposed to each other, we should not hesitate to pronounce for that of the mind in preference to that of the body. We feel that there is more actual civilization in a verse of the Gospel, an axiom of philosophy, or a stanza of poetry imprinted eternally on the memory or manners of a nation, than in the Crystal Palace of London, or in an Industrial Exhibition of all the mechanical arts in the universe. Your workshops, wares, manufactures, and machines produce marvels of weaving and carving; but all the machinery in the world will never create an idea or a sentiment. In mechanism is comprised the hands, but not the soul, of humanity. But it is not the hand which makes the man. Some of the most despised beings in the creation have a hand as complete and as delicately cuticled as your own, and nevertheless they are thrust down contemptuously to the lowest step of the ladder. Why is this? Because they are not endowed with the faculty of words; and that speech, the animated engine of truth, contains within itself light, religion, morality, beauty, and goodness; in fine, all the lofty attributes of the soul. High praise then to national eloquence, the true standard of comparative civilization! From this Divine source the poor shepherds of Arabia possess an epic poem in their deserts; while we in our industrial capitals have nothing for our nations of labourers beyond taverns and drinking-songs!

Digitized by Google

BOSSUET.

(A.D. 1627.)

If, after having studied, in all their details, the actions, works, opinions, faults, virtues, style, and language of so eminent a person as Bossuet, we desire to sum up, in one word, his general character, the word which presents itself to our minds as descriptive of the man is—Priest.

The priest, in all his majesty, his authority, his intellectual pride, could not be better represented than in the person of Bossuet.

Bossuet, to exhibit himself as he was,—to develope, in all their extent and grandeur, the high qualities of soul, genius, diplomacy, energy, and eloquence, with which Nature had endowed him, could not have been anything but a priest.

This eminent person was made for the priesthood, the pontificate, the altar, the vestibule of the cathedral, the pulpit, the trailing robe, and the tiara; any other place, office, or habiliment would be inconsistent

Digitized by Google

with such a nature. The mind could not picture Bossuet to itself in the habit of a layman. He was born a high-priest; his nature and profession are so indissolubly bound up and blended together, that even thought itself cannot separate them; he is not a man, but an oracle.

We do not propose here either to flatter or disparage the ministry; we desire only to speak of the minister with the tone of a philosopher and historian. Theology, like conscience, belongs to the private property of each communion; we shall not invade its precincts, but putting aside the doctrine of the priest, and only considering the sacerdotal calling in its relations to the world, we must acknowledge the moral superiority and exalted privileges which this profession offers to the man of genius and virtue who devotes himself to its exercise.

In the first place, a prejudgment of piety, power, and virtue is spread over the priest from the moment when he assumes his office; the holiness of the sanctuary follows him in some degree, even when he is at a distance from the consecrated locality. This prejudice is not purely imaginary: we know the weakness, the vices, the ambitious aspirations, the pride, the state hypocrisy which are mixed up with the *bureau* or the gown; the Gospel itself raises the stone from the whitened sepulchres, in order to expose false assumptions of sanctity; the robe cannot change the deformities of the bodies. There are vices in the priesthood, and these vices are even worse than in other professions,

Digitized by Google

because they jar more with the holiness of God and the purity of morals.

But without according on this account any peculiar privileges to the ministers of religion, it is impossible not to admit that the vocation has an influence upon the life of the votary; and that the sacred profession is that in which, taking equal numbers, the impartial observation of the philosopher and the moralist discovers the greatest amount of piety and virtue.

We need not search for any supernatural agency to account for this; independent of any other reason, the cause may be found in the vocation itself. In the first place (not in every case, but in the greater number), dispositions which devote themselves to this thankless, harsh, and contemplative life of self-denial upon earth, in anticipation of a celestial home, are naturally grave, melancholy, chastened in heart; uninfluenced by those strong passions which agitate life; disposed to obedience, reflection, worship, prayer, and the sacrifice of earthly goods to heavenly expectations. The vocation is not virtue itself, but it is the road to virtue. It is much more probable that a man, placed by his own natural disposition in this path, will rise to holiness rather than fall into depravity. Finally, the sacred profession produces a constant and habitual exercise of certain of man's moral faculties to the exclusion of others. Such exercise, carried on from infancy to the grave, fortifies good inclinations, and weakens evil propensities. Virtue is strength, and this is increased

Digitized by Google

a hundredfold, like other strength, by constant practice. Who will venture to assert that wrestling does not make the athlete, the battle-field the warrior, the tribune the orator, and reflection the philosopher? Why then should not study, prayer, meditation, and a continued struggle against the natural inclinations of the body, be also the foundation-stones of piety and virtue? The simple habit of thinking, preaching, and practising truth outwardly, is enough to inspire a taste and a desire to simulate, if it does not create, the actual reality in the soul. The office of the priest must therefore be considered generally as a fair presumption of the integrity of the man.

When we desire gold, we seek it at the goldsmith's; when we wish for incense, we look for it in the censer; and when we are anxious to find holiness, we expect to discover it in those who are sanctified by their profession.

There is yet another reason why virtue should be more frequently seen and more purely exercised in the sacerdotal calling than in any other, and this consists in that supplement to honesty, known as the dread of public shame. The world narrowly scrutinizes the conduct of the priest, to see if his life conforms to his profession; the vice which is scarcely distinguishable as a blemish in general society, becomes a glaring scandal in the sanctuary. This fear of worldly disgrace is a profane, but at the same time a vigilant, custodian of the lives of the ministers of the altar: he who wears a white robe fears much more the contamination of

Digitized by Google

a spot than one who dresses in the less conspicuous garments of the crowd.

That instinctive holiness which surrounds the priest with a *prestige* of virtue superior to the rest of mankind, is not entirely a chimera; respect for the priesthood is but an outward sign of that inward veneration which every pious mind feels towards the Creator. The ministers of religion pass their lives in more intimate communion with the Deity than mere men of the world are accustomed to seek; they have holy names stamped upon their bosoms; they wear the livery of the King of kings, and when we salute them we pay homage to the Master through his servants.

Moreover they speak from the tribune of the soul; they are the orators of moral feeling; the pulpit is their throne; this throne, to the occupier who has genius to wield his power and opportunity, is greater than that of kings: it is from thence the consciences of men are governed. Of all the eminences which a mortal may reach on earth, the highest to a man of talent is incontestably the sacred pulpit. If this individual happens to be *Bossuet;* that is to say, if he unites in his person, conviction to inspire the commanding attitude, purity of life to enhance the power of truth, untiring zeal, an air of imposing authority, celebrity which commands respectful attention, episcopal rank which consecrates, age which gives holiness of appearance, genius which constitutes the divinity of speech, reflective power which marks the mastery of intelligence, sudden bursts of eloquence which carry the

Digitized by Google

minds of listeners by assault, poetic imagery which adds lustre to truth,—a deep, sonorous voice, which reflects the tone of the thoughts,—silvery locks, the paleness of strong emotion, the penetrating glance, the expressive mouth;—in a word, all the animated and well-varied gestures which indicate the emotions of the soul;—if such a man issues slowly from his self-concentrated reflection, as from some inward sanctuary; if he suffers himself to be raised gradually by excitement, like the eagle, the first heavy flapping of whose wings can scarcely produce air enough to carry him aloft; if he at length respires freely, and takes flight; if he no longer feels the pulpit beneath his feet; if he draws in a full breath of the Divine Spirit, and pours forth unceasingly from this lofty height, to his hearers, the inspiration which comes to them as the word of God,—this being is no longer individual man, he becomes an organ of the Divine will, a prophetic voice.

And what a voice! A voice which is never hoarse, broken, soured, irritated, or troubled by the worldly and passionate struggles of interest peculiar to the time; a voice which, like that of the thunder in the clouds, or the organ in the cathedral, has never been anything but the medium of power and Divine persuasion to the soul; a voice which only speaks to kneeling auditors; a voice which is listened to in profound silence, to which none reply save by an inclination of the head or by falling tears—those mute applauses of the soul!—a voice which is never refuted or contradicted, even when it astonishes or wounds; a voice, in fine, which does not

Digitized by Google

speak in the name of opinion, which is variable; nor in the name of philosophy, which is open to discussion; nor in the name of country, which is local; nor in the name of regal supremacy, which is temporal; nor in the name of the speaker himself, who is an agent transformed for the occasion; but which speaks in the name of God, an authority of language unequalled upon earth, and against which the lowest murmur is impious and the smallest opposition a blasphemy.

Such is the tribune of the priesthood, the tripod of the prophet, the pulpit of the sacred orator. We can only behold therein Bossuet, and we cannot recognise Bossuet in any other place. His life is but the history of his pulpit eloquence. The man is worthy of the rostrum from which he preached; no other oratory has ever equalled his. Great names have been selected and preserved, but Bossuet, whose genius equals theirs, excels them in the range and elevation of his subject; they speak of earth, while he discourses of heaven. Cicero does not surpass him in a careful selection and ample supply of words; Demosthenes possesses not superior energy of persuasion; Chatham is not more richly endowed with poetic oratory; the periods of Mirabeau do not flow more easily; Vergniaud is not more redundant of imagery and illustration. All have less elevation, extent and majesty in their language; they were human orators, but Bossuet alone was divine! To understand him fully, we must first mount to his own level and encounter him in the heavens.

If we are to relate his life, we can but speak of his

Digitized by Google

preaching. He was born, he lived, and died in the temple; his existence was one continued, never-ending sermon; in him the man disappears entirely in the priest. It is in his profession that we must seek the source of his genius, his virtues, and his self-denial. An honest man and an inflexible doctrinist, in vindicating his own dogmas he firmly believed that he was enhancing the honour of God.

Bossuet was born at Dijon, the capital of Burgundy, on the 28th of September, 1627. He was carried on the following day to the gothic church of St. John by a religious family, as if it had been intended that his first cries should be heard in one of those cathedrals of the old worship, which he was afterwards destined to fill until his death with the tones of his powerful voice. He was christened by the name of Jacques-Bénigne. His grandfather, who kept a register of dates and events relating to the family, inscribed prophetically after the baptismal appellations of his grandson this verse from the Bible: "The Lord led him about: He instructed him: He kept him as the apple of His eye."

His father was called Bénigne Bossuet; his mother, Madeleine Mochette. She had already brought her husband six children; Bossuet was the seventh; and she subsequently added three more to the number.

The family of the Bossuets, who became, through this infant, the glory of Burgundy, was of ancient origin. The etymology of the name, derived from the Latin, appears to denote, in its origin, the rural, laborious, and patient character of some ancestor who

Digitized by Google

was a tiller of the hard-yielding field: "*Bos suetus aratro*," an ox accustomed to the plough. The indefatigable and well-disciplined genius of the newly-born infant was not destined to falsify this characteristic of the race.

The family had not been long established at Dijon. They had removed thither from another small town of the same province, called Seurre, a place of agriculture and pasturage, situated in the meadows at the mouth of the Saône. The natural and progressive movement which induces families who are in easy circumstances, according as they form distant or more elevated alliances, to remove from the country to small cities, and from small cities to the capitals of the provinces, had induced the grandfather of Bossuet to settle at Dijon. Dijon might be called a federal city, which preserved the remains of its national independence. Bossuet's grandfather, his brothers, sons, and nephews, had filled there small but important posts in the parliament and the court of Exchequer; steps by which the principal citizens ascended from the hereditary magistracy to nobility itself. Bossuet had connexions and relatives amongst the proudest aristocracy of the exclusive and haughty town of Dijon.

The innate contempt that Bossuet seemed to have adopted from the hour of his birth for the doctrine of equality; the instinctive love of hierarchy, high caste, and authority; the peremptory tone and haughty glance, are the natural and distinctive traits of this patrician breed of Upper Burgundy, where the blood,

Digitized by Google

warm at the head, but coldly stimulates the heart. The character of a race is to be retraced in each of its descendants; the exceptions are only accidental. The peculiar genius of an individual will not belie the genius of a city; Dijon is an intellectual capital, but not one that overflows with enthusiasm or feeling. St. Bernard, Bossuet, Buffon, natives of this town, were men compounded rather of bronze and marble than of flesh: the first had Abélard for his victim, the second Fénelon, and the third dissected all nature without finding a tear, a single hymn of praise, or a Deity!

About the time of Bossuet's birth his father was appointed one of the council of the parliament of Metz. He left his wife and family at Dijon. One of his brothers, Claude Bossuet, also a member of the parliamentary council of Burgundy, undertook the charge of them. He was as severe and learned as his profession. He soon discovered the transcendent talents of his nephew, and laboured at their cultivation for the honour of the family. The boy was brought up at home, but going every day to receive religious and classical instruction at the Jesuits' College, he soon excelled, by a natural quickness, all students of his own age and standing; masters and schoolfellows were thus obliged to place him in a class by himself. We only envy what we can hope to equal. The superiority of his abilities disconcerted every feeling, even admiration. He had none of the characteristics of childhood except his face; his mind was mature from his

Digitized by Google

birth. The books in his uncle's library scarcely sufficed to satisfy his love of reading. His passion for ideal beauty, for the imagery and harmony of languages, made him devote the greater portion of his thoughts to the poets, those divine musicians of the soul! He became intoxicated with poetry. Homer, above all others, who reflects nature as a limpid stream reflects the objects on its banks, became the uninspired bible of his imagination: it was from those immortal pages that he gained his simplicity, dignity, and pathos; from the prophets he acquired the power of language and rhythmical inspiration. We can less understand the strong admiration which he entertained throughout his whole life for the productions of the Latin poet Horace,—a writer with a genius, exquisite, it is true, but so subtle and refined, that his harp is only strung with the softer fibres of the heart;—a careless voluptuary, who amuses himself by listening to the stream of life flowing gently within him, through flowers, to death. There is nothing in Horace to justify this strong predilection of Bossuet, except indeed it be the simple grace of thought,—that first expression springing from an inspired impulse, the perilous and always happy play of free versification which the poet launches at the risk of being broken in its fall, but which ever alights in exact cadence and harmony with the idea intended to be conveyed. Bossuet, like all fortunate men, delighted in a bold hazard.

Perhaps too this unaccountable preference for Horace, the least inspired of all poets, owed its origin to the

Digitized by Google

impression that poetry had first made upon him in his childhood through the pages of this author. This delightful feeling continued pre-eminent, and gradually changed to gratitude in his soul. There are in libraries, as well as in the world, ill-assorted meetings which grow into old friendships.

But the Bible effaced all except this slight remembrance of Horace: the Bible, and above all the poetical portions of Holy Writ, struck as if with lightning, and dazzled the eyes of the child; he fancied that he saw the living fire of Sinai, and heard the voice of Omnipotence re-echoed by the rocks of Horeb. His God was Jehovah; his law-giver, Moses; his high-priest, Aaron; his poet, Isaiah; his country, Judæa. The vivacity of his imagination, the poetical bent of his genius, the analogy of his disposition to that of the Orientals,—the fervid nature of the people and ages described, the sublimity of the language, the everlasting novelty of the history, the grandeur of the laws,—the piercing eloquence of the hymns, and finally, the ancient, consecrated, and traditionally reverential character of the book, transformed Bossuet at once into a biblical enthusiast. The metal was malleable; the impression was received, and remained indellibly stamped. This child became a prophet: such he was born, such he was as he grew to manhood, lived, and died—the Bible transfused into a man.

We cannot read, in the history of his childhood, of the effect produced upon Bossuet by this study, without being reminded of those enduring and gigantic traces

Digitized by Google

of the feet of Adam and Buddha which the credulous inhabitants of India and Arabia show to travellers imprinted in the granite of the Libanus or Thibet; the rock, hardened by ages, has preserved the deep impression received by the clay; flesh has petrified itself to stone. It was so with the Bible on the infant mind of Bossuet.

He was only nine years old when he received the tonsure, as a sign that he was devoted to the service of the altar. At thirteen he was appointed canon of Metz by an anticipated dotation on the revenues of the Church, in which he became enrolled and paid before he reached the age of commencing duty.

This tonsure and dress assimilated well with his countenance and deportment: the future priest was shadowed in the youth. He was tall for his age, but afterwards increased greatly in stature; his limbs were delicate and flexible, like those of a man intended to bear no other burden than the weight of thought; who glides, buried in reflection, with noiseless steps, between the columns of the cathedral, and who, accustomed to genuflexion and prostration, is continually bowed down before the majesty of God. His hair was brown and silky, and one or two natural curls upon his forehead resembled the crown of Moses, or the horns of the prophetic ram. These curls, thus arranged, of which we still see the traces in his portraits at an advanced age, gave an air of inspiration to his head. His eyes were black and piercing, but sweet. On his face there shone a serene and perpetual light, a light

Digitized by Google

which was never obscured by flashes, and which attracted without dazzling the eye. His high and open forehead showed the small veins which interlaced his temples; his nose was almost straight, fine, and delicately chiselled, between the soft Grecian and energetic Roman, and was neither raised by insolence nor depressed by stupidity. His mouth was large, with thin lips, which often moved without speaking, as if employed in the utterance of some inward reflection, which modesty repressed in the presence of older men than himself; a half-smile full of grace and thought was their most frequent expression, and they bore the impress of a disposition naturally inclined to sincerity and averse to rudeness or contempt. In his face, taken altogether, the sweetness of expression softened so completely the strength of intellect, and the gentleness of each feature agreed so harmoniously with the manliness of the whole, that the extent of his genius was only discernible in the delicate tracery of the veins and nerves of thought, and admiration was subdued by affection. No reader of the works or life of this celebrated theologian would inscribe the name of Bossuet beneath the mild face that painters have handed down to us. It is evident that the soul of this great man was of one stamp, and his genius of another. Nature made him tender; dogmatism rendered him hard; but still he was ever calm and self-collected. The precocious thinness and pallid hue of his cheeks proceeded from the asceticism of the temple and the severity of midnight studies, which drained the sap of life.

Digitized by Google

Such was Bossuet in his youth, and such we find him in old age; delineated either by the pencil of the painter or the chisel of the sculptor; the personification of a moral beauty which knows no infancy and feels no decay.

This aspect and character caused him to be respected as well as loved. There is not a single error to be found in his boyish career, nor any light indiscretion as he advanced to manhood. He appeared to escape without a struggle from the frailties of nature, and to be passionately attracted only by the good and beautiful.

It might have been said that he himself respected beforehand the future authority of his name and ministry, and that he did not wish one single stain of humanity to attach itself to the servant of God when he should enter the tabernacle.

When he was fourteen years of age, his father, at that time dean of the parliament of Metz, recalled him to that city, that he might benefit by his appointment as Canon, and complete his theological and other studies. A short time only elapsed before he was sent to Paris, to set him more visibly before the eyes of the Church, of which he was already considered the brightest hope.

He arrived in Paris on the day when Cardinal Richelieu, dying, entered the city, as Tiberius entered Rome, in the midst of silence produced by terror and empurpled with the blood of Cinq-Mars and De Thou, which he had just shed at Lyons. Bossuet was present at the funeral of this prime minister, priest, and

Digitized by Google

executioner, who dragged his master as a vassal in his train. The spectacle recalled the lower empire of Rome in all its degenerate baseness and ferocity. The jealous minister tore the King's dearest friends from him, and insolently threw their dead bodies at his feet, under the pretext that they were sacrificed to the aggrandizement of the monarchy. The King wept, trembled, and was silent. The people gazed in stupor on these arbitrary proceedings, without understanding them. History has been cowardly enough to imitate the people, and to accord to this capricious, cruel, and sanguinary Sejanus, a merit for his audacity and an immortality for his executions. This reputation will become infamy when impartial posterity shall judge of actions by the standard of moral rectitude, and not by the measure of success.

The hand of Providence interfered to deliver the throne and nation from this Cromwell of France. Cardinal Richelieu died of exhaustion, produced by his ambition and tyranny. He tried to disguise from himself and from the people, the agony he suffered, beneath rouged cheeks and gaudy apparel. In order to secure him from any inconvenience arising from the jarring of wheeled carriages, relays of twenty of his personal lictors, with uncovered heads always exposed to heat or rain, carried him in a litter on their shoulders from one end of the kingdom to the other. This litter was a moving chamber, in which was placed his bed, his cabinet, his domestic officers, and his secretaries, that he might even when journeying issue his orders for

Digitized by Google

the government of the kingdom, and thus divert his thoughts from his natural want of rest. As the gates of many cities were neither wide nor high enough for this portable palace, they were thrown down to allow the aged invalid to enter; those of Paris had already been destroyed: chains were extended on each side of the streets through which he passed on his road to the Louvre, to restrain the curiosity of the crowding gazers, who beheld with astonishment through their windows, the Cardinal half-reclining upon a purple couch, and dictating to his secretary, seated before a table, ostentatious orders to the different ministers. The people bowed before the priest, while they trembled in the presence of the tyrant.

This triumphal progress established a deep and lasting impression upon the mind of Bossuet. It was a living personification of Egyptian theocracy and monarchy joined together by an indissoluble unity of government, in which the King bowed before the priest, and the people prostrated themselves before both. This first accidental apparition on the day of his arrival in Paris, raised up indescribable dreams of antiquity in the imagination of the young observer; it was the purple of a prince of the Church and the unbounded power of a minister, presented in palpable perspective, and united in the same person. Bossuet from his profession might aspire to the one, and from his genius to the other: it will soon be seen that, if not his destiny, it was at least his aim until the hour of his death.

Digitized by Google

The young man was admitted through the influence of his family into one of those establishments, half lay and half religious, where the Church, in that age mistress of the University, prepared its neophytes. This house was called the College of Navarre, of which Bossuet was at the same time a member and a disciple. He there enjoyed liberty restrained by discipline—the promoter of good manners and youthful studies. He was soon recognised at Paris, as at Dijon, as a youth whose eloquence would hereafter render him celebrated. He was selected for his talent, by the University, to deliver the public speeches on days of solemn festivals. The bishops and ministers whom he addressed on these occasions were charmed with the ease, dignity, and powerful elocution of this richly-endowed novice; his fame spread like the report of a miracle. In spite of himself he was dragged from his obscurity, and his presence contended for at religious ceremonies or literary meetings. He was eagerly sought after in the palaces of those princes and princesses who were passionately devoted to intellectual pursuits. It was the epoch of a similar revival of letters at Paris, to that of Leo X. at Rome, or of the Medici at Florence. The profane and the sacred, truth and fable, preachers and orators, were alike confounded in the taste or enthusiasm for literature. A relation of the young student, Francis Bossuet, secretary to the council of finance at the court, presented his nephew to the Marquis du Plessis-Guénégaud, a friend of the Minister Fouquet and a patron of letters, in the con-

Digitized by Google

fidence of that Mæcenas. The Marquis de Feuquières, governor of Versailles, who had known Bossuet's father when he commanded at Metz, received the son with all the favour that old friendship reflects upon the young. He spoke of him to Madame de Rambouillet and to her ultra-refined circle, who desired to see and hear him. He was called upon to extemporize a sermon in the drawing-room of M. de Feuquières before these fastidious judges; Voiture, the sovereign critic of the day, was present: they took Bossuet by surprise, and gave him the text, the subject, and the time. He had the weakness to consent, either from deference or vanity, to this play of genius upon sacred subjects. He was happy and sublime. The cry of admiration uttered by Voiture and Madame de Rambouillet in the saloons of M. de Feuquières re-echoed throughout all Paris. Fashion, sometimes the presage, but more frequently the parody of fame, seized upon the name of Bossuet and carried it to the ears of Royalty. The great Condé, upon whose tomb Bossuet in his old age was destined to shed such memorable tears, was delighted to be present one day at a trial-lecture of this young orator, which promised to shed glory upon his government of Burgundy. The Princes of Condé were hereditary presidents of these States, or rather of the council that ruled over the administrative interests of the province: they went every year to hold their court for several weeks at Dijon, and were acquainted with all the families of note in the city. They had their clients in Dijon, of whom

Digitized by Google

they became the natural patrons in Paris; from thence arose that paternal protection bestowed by the elder Condé upon the representative of the Bossuets.

During the time that the rising orator was occupied in forming his taste for letters and courtly manners by an intimacy with the most illustrious families of the kingdom, he was improving in the highest virtues of his profession, in the society and under the discipline of the most venerated ecclesiastics of his day.

One aged man, whose genius was identical with charity, and who might be called the St. John of modern Christianity, was about to close his days in Paris when Bossuet commenced his career. This man was St. Vincent de Paul.

Shattered by time, tired of controversy, and disgusted with religious quarrels, which had produced nothing but victims and scaffolds, this holy man had only found the true province of the priest in the clemency and charity which soothes instead of irritating. He had latterly assumed the functions of Providence, and had become a universal blessing and benefactor. Active virtue appeared to him the brightest ornament of the priesthood. Doctrines may be disputed, but actions establish themselves. Retired to a half-open cloister, a small number of pupils came to hear and receive his last precepts, which were all summed up, like those of St. John, in one single instruction, "Love God, and love one another." St. Vincent de Paul frequently called his pupils to conferences, in which he exercised the familiar language rather than the orato-

Digitized by Google

rical powers of his young disciples. The heart never declaims. St. Vincent did not teach grandiloquent phraseology, but he inculcated persuasion and tenderness.

He distinguished Bossuet amongst his disciples, and tried to form his conscience rather than his genius: he selected for him a confessor who was more anxious for his piety than his fame. Religious convictions, it must be admitted, were dearer to Bossuet than the possession of unrivalled talent. He conformed with humility, and even with inclination, to the austere ordinances of his faith; he loved prayer, meditation, exercises of the soul, ceremonies, the church, the altar: his punctilious assiduity edified those who were burning to emulate his example.

He found in the study of sacred mysteries, a depth of wisdom and a profundity of revelation in which he delighted to bury himself. His vivid imagination thought that it could thus grasp the secrets of the Deity at their source; his enthusiasm expelled doubt; his mind was convinced by the strength of his will. It is not inconsistent for such a genius to attempt to rule the world by the same despotic tyranny with which it governs itself.

To believe, with such a conviction, was to repress all deliberation of thought upon supernatural subjects. When a mind has become so completely subjugated, it feels a right of compelling all others to adopt the same unbounded, fixed, and implicit faith. From this innate fanaticism, sincere, and admitting of no argument,

Digitized by Google

proceeded all the acts of intolerance, and conversions for the glory of religion, so zealously and actively persevered in by Bossuet. Nevertheless he always preserved a deep impression of the Christian benevolence and mild virtues of St. Vincent de Paul, which contrasted so strongly with the harshness of his proselytism. When the Church sought to trace the life of this good man, after his death, to consecrate and sanctify his memory, Bossuet, upon being consulted, thus delivered his written testimony :—

" There were assemblies," said he, " at his house, on the Tuesday in every week ; even eminent bishops were attracted by the pious reputation of this excellent man, and they there learnt to preach the Gospel as much by examples as by discourses. Full of gratitude for the memory of this pious individual (for we knew him personally in our youth, and he inculcated in us principles of piety and self-discipline), we now to-day, as we approach our own old age, recall with singular pleasure his tender lessons. With what edification have we not, at our leisure, contemplated his virtues, his admirable character, the gravity of his manners, and his rare prudence, united with the most perfect simplicity ; his application to business, his zeal for the welfare of souls, and his charitable institutions, in which his memory is perpetuated in each of the saintly women who continue his good works !"

Pious exercises did not deter Bossuet from devoting himself with the same ardour to eloquence,—a vocation inseparably characteristic of his life. He cultivated

Digitized by Google

this talent equally with his religious duties: the transcendent powers of the orator were developed beneath the robe of the priest. He studied poetry and eloquence in all branches of literature; he even devoted himself to the improvement of his diction. To modulate his voice, to study his attitudes, to regulate his gesticulation, he went frequently to the theatres, to hear the great tragic actors who recited upon the stage the dialogues and speeches of Rotrou, Corneille, and Racine. He did not consider it any desecration to the word of God in his mouth, to devote to it all the energy and excellence of human organs: he borrowed all he could from profane art, that he might embellish and add strength to his sacred calling. What he sought from the drama was not the idle pleasure of hearing a speech beautifully declaimed in a musical cadence; he looked for examples by which to reach the perfection of oratory. He did not hide from others his frequent visits to the theatre, the only forum where he could learn to imitate the ancient orators, and the most ascetic did not blame him.*

Voice, attitude, and gesture are common to preachers, senators, and tragedians; each arrives at eminence by mutually observing the others. Bossuet desired to be a great actor in the temple of God; he studied declamation as he had studied language, but he was mistaken in the idea that the stage could supply him with

* Yet Bossuet is the author of a most violent philippic against the stage, written in 1697.—TRANSL.

Digitized by Google

models; artificial diction could only injure him. Nature, faith, piety, had done all that he required. He was born a master; it was for actors to study the apostle.

He tore himself from his studies and his friendships Paris, to return to Metz to his father, to take possession of his canonry, and to wait for the age when he should be able to fulfil those high ecclesiastical duties to which his reputation would inevitably call him. He lived there during six years, the life of a cenobite. This period comprised one long meditation upon the Bible, the Gospel, and the writings of the first founders of Christianity: St. John Chrysostom, the Demosthenes of Holy Writ; Tertullian, the Tacitus of the persecutions; Origen, the poet of doctrine; and above all, St. Augustine, the Plato of the faith,—were his favourite authors. The natural severity of his taste must have been well-founded not to have been corrupted, exaggerated, inflated, or weakened by the writers and orators of an age of literary decline, who forced language and imagery, by descending into declamation instead of rising into eloquence. But the oratorical style of Bossuet was not to be corrupted even by his masters. From his intercourse with them he adopted their faith, but repudiated their faults. He indulged in no society, to distract his thoughts from study, but that of the Maréchal de Schomberg, Governor of Metz. The Maréchale, a woman celebrated for her beauty and wit, who had formerly entertained a pure and subdued passion for Louis XIII., loved and protected the young

Digitized by Google

orator. In her letters to the court she incessantly spoke of the merit and talent of the canon of Metz. She urged him to gratify the King by applying his zeal to the conversion of the Protestants in his canonry. Bossuet acquired, in these controversies with several ministers of the reformed faith of the province, a habit of haughty fulmination against what he considered errors in orthodoxy; and of considering as state crimes all differences of opinion on established dogmas of the church—a habit which became the weakness, and at a later period, the stain of his life.

Zeal for unity of faith burnt fiercely at this period within the breasts of all classes. Political unity did not appear firmly established either to Richelieu, Mazarin, the young King, Louis XIV., or to his mother, the pious and gentle Anne of Austria herself, as long as catholicism did not control every conscience throughout the kingdom, either from conviction, corruption, or power.

Anne of Austria happened to visit Metz, saw Bossuet, and admired his eloquence and zeal. She employed him to form a missionary society for the conversion of families of the reformed faith. This mission was the germ of all those acts of compulsion and proscription which, at a later period, inflicted on the kingdom bloodshed and depopulation. Bossuet adopted the habit of making political power a holy adjunct to his sacerdotal authority, and of threatening those with the King whom he wished to reconcile to God. He received from the court the reward, unsought no doubt,

Digitized by Google

but still direct, of labours achieved for the sake of heaven.

His efforts at making proselytes, though most religious in principle, became a moral constraint upon the soul, and soon an armed force against the conscience. He confounded under the same robe his clerical and political ministry. It was this original confusion between the priest and courtier which often warped the direct path of his life. The renunciations of Protestantism that Bossuet received, either from the force of real or pretended conviction, were so many acts of homage that this conqueror of souls presented to his King. The court did not yet venture to persecute openly, but employed seduction and intimidation in every quarter. Bossuet, through his youth, his piety, his zeal, and his eagerness to advance the prevailing opinions of the royal circle, proved himself the most useful and brilliant instrument of this conquest of the entire kingdom to the religion of the monarch.

The conversion of a courtier, the Abbé de Dangeau, and soon after, the more illustrious example of the Maréchal de Turenne, formed valuable additions to the celebrity of Bossuet.

Turenne was a man of the world, who, throughout a long life, had been broken in to all the usual artifices of courts, and was as much a politician as a warrior. Having changed sides, during the minority of Louis XIV., from the revolutionary party to that of the King, he felt he had much to do to regain the favour of the prince, now firmly seated upon the throne. He

Digitized by Google

could not therefore give a better proof of his allegiance, than the adoption, though somewhat tardy, of the religion of his sovereign. Whether he thought that heaven could be purchased at such a price, or calculated that the tenure of his rank in the army and state depended upon this act, he hesitated long enough to give an air of decency to the change. He wished to be instructed by Bossuet, who had been recalled to Paris, and nominated to a bishopric. It gave Bossuet little trouble to convince an old soldier, who came determined to be a convert. Turenne, sufficiently persuaded, repaired to court at an hour when the satellites of royalty filled the palace. The King was at table. Turenne besought a speedy and private interview. The King rose and conducted the General with deference to the embrasure of one of the windows. "Sire," said Turenne, "I have something to tell you in confidence, which I beg of you not yet to divulge. I wish to change my religion." "Ah! how glad I am!" cried the King, opening his arms to press him to his heart, but restraining himself lest he should betray, by this embrace, to the courtiers—who could see without hearing them—the joy that he felt. He led the proselyte into his cabinet; there he embraced and congratulated him, and told him that he should instantly send a messenger to the Pope, that the happiness he would feel at such an illustrious conquest might not be delayed. "Sire," said Turenne, "do not do so, I beseech you; for if I thought that this spontaneous conversion would gain me even the glove that your Majesty carries in

Digitized by Google

your hand, I would not change my faith." The King, in the confidential familiarity of his triumph, wished to appoint Turenne's confessor. They both entered a carriage, without attendants or armorial bearings, that they might seek together, without being recognised, a fitting keeper of the conscience for the Maréchal, in the monasteries of Paris.

This conversion proved the means of advancing Bossuet still nearer to the episcopal bench. The conquest of the old General was attributed to the perusal of a book which Bossuet had just published, called 'Exposition of the Doctrines of the Church of Rome.' This work, written during his residence at Metz, spoke more for his faith than his talent. Clearness in controversy, uniformity in style, and the application of reason to all subjects of mystery, are the only characteristics of this first of his writings. Bossuet showed himself in it rather a great catechist than a profound theologian; but this was what the time required. This book at its birth became the text, and remains so still, for all Roman Catholics. Bossuet's fame, great already as an orator, increased as a controversialist. He was summoned to preach at Paris, and then his reputation reached its climax.

Crowds, such as had not been seen since the days of Abélard, filled the aisles of the churches in which the young minister preached. They had heard, and they might still hear, more finished and more literary discourses; but they never did and never could expect to listen to anything of a more exalted character: at once

Digitized by Google

he rose to the sublime. Bossuet drew his auditors from their habitual thoughts, and transported them through new regions into the presence and contemplation of the Creator. It was the orator above the clouds reaching heaven with his hand, seeing earth afar off and below his feet, playing with thunder and lightning, and filling with contempt for sublunary matters; the abyss of high, great, and eternal thoughts, over which he caused his listeners to totter by dazzling them with his mighty elevation.

His style, conformable with this majesty of position, rose to an equality with the infinite. It was simple as the oracle which disdains to please,—unpremeditated as the word uttered, without selection, in the rapidity of thought,—slow as meditation, which forgets the lapse of time,—rapid as the inspiration which fears to escape from itself,—unaimed as the shaft which is hurled at random and which the eye does not even follow to witness the effect,—naked as the truth from which every veil is torn and trampled underfoot in the eagerness to display its natural purity,—collected and reflective as the temple; sometimes as unpolished as the people,—always guided by nature, and not by art, to the idea or sentiment, it desires to express,—poetical above all other considerations, or rather, losing sight of the auditory and the chain of reasoning to utter an unexpected ebullition of joy or grief; and giving vent to involuntary feeling in direct communion with Deity, either in dialogues or hymns which have had no parallel since the days of Moses and the prophets.

Digitized by Google

Such are the sermons of Bossuet, of which we only possess notes and rough sketches. They are landmarks in space, between heaven and earth, by which to trace the windings and intricacies of inspiration. But these notes and rough sketches are so connected by logical reasoning, that the chain which is occasionally broken can be easily replaced and the voids filled up by imagination. A few words explain the entire discourse; and the impression made upon the listeners may be estimated less by the text itself than by the blanks. We feel that each of these gaps supplies an abyss of reflections, thoughts, and exclamations, into which the orator plunged with his hearers; and we conceive a more expanded idea of the whole from these incidental deficiencies.

Who cannot thus reconstruct, by the aid of a few vestiges, buildings as perfect and gigantic as those of Palmyra or Baalbec, even though the original foundations, plans, and materials are with difficulty distinguishable from the surrounding dust?

Tradition tells us that the elocution of Bossuet conformed to his genius. Lofty stature, an imposing attitude, collected features, refined action, a deeply-toned voice regulated by the soul and not by art;—a dignified bearing, derived as much from nature as from professional habitude, and a deep feeling of superiority,—not as a man, but as the medium selected to convey the Divine word to attentive hearers,—and finally, that indescribable confidence which the presentiment of future glory gives at the commencement of their career

Digitized by Google

to the chosen band destined for immortality;—such were the leading characteristics of Bossuet in the pulpit. The man was forgotten in the inspired missionary. The auditors felt that they were not listening to a measured discourse, but to a torrent of rushing eloquence. They retired more excited than charmed; they had no time to think of admiration, which the orator had no thought of producing. Of all the feelings of contempt which he felt for the world, none were more sincere than those he expressed for human approbation, and this sincerity quickened his natural eloquence: his words came from such a height that they crushed all in their descent, even the orator himself; hence it was that they carried such weight, and resounded so loudly as they fell.

The Queen, Anne of Austria, recollected the young theologian whom she had seen at Metz, and wished to hear him preach. This Princess, who had abdicated empire, was endued with piety as tender as her heart. Her long intimacy with Mazarin,—an Italian of the school of Leo X., as also of that of Machiavelli,—had fostered her taste for the fine arts and for eloquence. Bossuet preached before her in the chapel of a convent of nuns. He soothed her feelings as a mother, by making rather a flattering comparison between the Queen, who had educated a king for the throne, and the Virgin, who had brought up a Divinity for the Cross. Adulation, ennobled by feelings of maternal respect, took nothing from the sanctity of the discourse: the orator was rather the consoler of a woman

Digitized by Google

in disgrace, than the courtier of a powerful queen. Anne of Austria wept tears of gratitude and admiration. She desired that the young preacher would write down the different thoughts and heads of this sermon, that she might hear it again in a larger assembly. The religious poet Santeuil, who had been admitted into the circle of privileged auditors in the Queen's suite, was so enthusiastic in his admiration of the poetical language of the preacher, that, from what he remembered of the sermon, he composed a hymn which is sung to this day in the churches, as an echo, in verse, of the sublime periods of Bossuet.

This success induced all the monasteries who desired to render their chapels celebrated, to request Bossuet to preach the serious of pious discourses called "Lent Lectures," which took place annually on the same mysteries, varied only by the fertility of imagination or talent of the preachers.

The first lecture which Bossuet delivered was in the church of the Carmelites, at Mount St. Geneviève, the most monastic and literary quarter of Paris. It is related that the masters and pupils of the neighbouring colleges, the academicians and theologians of the different factions which divided the Church between the Jesuits and Jansenists, struggled from dawn to secure places near the pulpit of the preacher. When he descended, at the conclusion of his discourse, groups —at first calm, but agitated by degrees from discussion—formed themselves in the vast court of the monastery to gaze on the man of such unrivalled eloquence

Digitized by Google

as he passed by. Some interpreted his words in favour of their own opinions; other claimed him as a partisan of their peculiar sect; but all agreed in declaring him to be a perfect prodigy in the pulpit. This unanimity of enthusiasm produced a momentary peace between the contending parties. Bossuet had in fact placed himself above them all by the high impartiality of disdain. He sought to elevate the Church above sectarianism, and to raise God higher than disputes. For a moment he compelled these fierce disputants to follow him into eternity.

It was in one of these convents that he gave way to a burst of eloquence in a eulogium upon St. Paul, the inspired Plato of Judæa, which, from the scraps of the discourse that have been preserved, we are enabled to quote. We here clearly see Bossuet himself transfigured into the apostle, as Michael Angelo imparted with his powerful chisel his own features and his own air of inspiration to the face of his statue of Moses.

"Christians," said he, "do not expect that the Apostle will flatter your ears by harmonious cadences, or charm them by gratifying your vain curiosity: listen to what he says of himself. We preach hidden wisdom—we preach a crucified God. Do not let us seek to add vain ornaments to that God who rejects the things of this world. If our lowliness is displeasing to the great, let them know that we covet their disdain, for Jesus Christ despises their ostentatious insolence, and desires only to be known to the humble. Let us bow, then, before the despised, and preach to them sermons, in

Digitized by Google

which meekness bears something of the humiliation of the cross, and which are worthy of that God who only desires to conquer by gentleness.

"It is for these well-grounded reasons that St. Paul rejects all the arts of rhetoric. His discourses, far from flowing with that agreeable sweetness, that calm equality which we admire in other orators, appear unequal and unfinished to those who do not study them deeply; and the delicate ones of this earth, whose ears, as they say, are so refined, are often offended by his irregular style. But, brethren, do not let us blush for this. The words of the Apostle are simple, but his thoughts are divine. If he is ignorant of rhetoric and despises philosophy, Jesus Christ takes the place of all, and his name, which is ever in his mouth, and his mysteries, which he describes in such a tone of inspiration, render his simplicity all-powerful. This man, unacquainted with fine language, whose elocution was rude, and who spoke like a stranger, goes into polished Greece, the mother of philosophy and oratory; and notwithstanding the opposition of the people, he there established more churches than Plato had acquired disciples, by an eloquence which was thought divine. He preached Jesus at Athens; and the most learned of the senators passed from the Areopagus to the school of this barbarian stranger. He pushed his conquests still further: he brought the majesty of the Roman fasces to the feet of Jesus, in the person of a pro-consul, and caused the judges, before whom he was cited, to tremble on their judgment-seats. Rome even listened

Digitized by Google

to his voice; and the day will yet arrive when this ancient mistress of the world will deem herself more honoured by an epistle from St. Paul, addressed to her citizens, than by all the far-famed harangues delivered in the forum by Cicero.

"And from whence, Christians, is this? It is that St. Paul had sources of persuasion that Greece could not teach, and Rome had not yet acquired,—an inspired power which delights in extolling what the great despise, and which is spread over and mingled with the august simplicity of his words. It is this that causes us to admire, in his epistles, a sentiment of superhuman virtue which prevails above ordinary rules, or rather does not persuade, as much as it captivates, the understanding,—which does not flatter the ear, but goes direct to the heart,—just as we see a great river retain, when flowing through the plain, that violent and impetuous force which it had acquired in the mountains from whence it derived its source. Thus the holy virtue, which is contained in the writings of St. Paul, even in the simplicity of his style, preserves all the vigour which it brings from the heaven from whence it has descended."

The fame of the preacher rose and increased after each discourse. The great Condé desired to hear him at Dijon, in what we may call his native pulpit, and in which another orator of our own days has appeared to remind his countrymen of Bossuet. He there showed himself to be, as he always contrived to appear at the same time—a politician and theologian,—inspired,

Digitized by Google

overwhelming, and adroit, never forgetful of the court in speaking of heaven, or regardless of heaven when addressing the court.

After an oratorical eulogium upon the great Condé, who was present, Bossuet in this discourse suddenly resumed his apostolic dignity after his courtier-like prostration.

"But no," cried he; "in recalling the name of which I speak, I would rather cast the grandeur of this world beneath the feet of God, than admire it longer even in a hero."

The King, prepossessed in favour of Bossuet, by his mother and the court, at length commanded that he should preach before him in the chapel of the Louvre.

This prince, who was almost illiterate at that time, possessed more than the science of admiring the beautiful in art; he really felt it as a revelation. The gift of appreciation, more than that of criticism, was the greatest faculty of mind possessed by Louis XIV., and it was to this gift that he owed the grandeur of his reign. The glory which he admired and discovered, even in the profundity of his ignorance, rebounded back through gratitude upon himself. He possessed an unusual power of reflection: the light which he kindled illuminated his own person.

The noble voice of Bossuet touched him as soon as he listened to it, and he pronounced him at once the prophet of the age. He also discerned, at the first glance, the strong vein of sound sense, consistency, and tempered discipline which ran through all his eloquence

Digitized by Google

—as the massive timbers may be discerned beneath the magnificence and ornaments of the edifice they support. He augured that this orator would become a politician: he remembered Richelieu and Mazarin, who had been the tyrants or tutors of his infancy. The vigour of the one and the cleverness of the other appeared to him to have again revived, with combined and increased force, in the person of this young candidate for public honour, who, like them, was born much more for the government of an empire than for the direction of a community or a diocese. He reserved him, in his own mind, rather for his worldly than for his spiritual adviser. He thought, by conferring dignities, to prepare him for the management of the French church under himself. This had become one of the most pressing necessities of his reign.

Religious faith was divided into many factions. The King wished to subjugate all to the common yoke of the Roman Catholic church, while he himself remained the only individual throughout the kingdom independent of the authority to which he would willingly submit as a man, but not as a sovereign. To effect this, he required the assistance of one who should be more than a bishop, less than a schismatic, and almost a patriarch: he felt that in Bossuet he should find the man he looked for, and he was not mistaken.

Upon his return to the Louvre, after the sermon, the King charged his private secretary, Rose, to compose a letter in his name, addressed to the father of the preacher to whom he had just listened.

Digitized by Google

Rose indited one of those laconic but memorable letters, proper for a king to write who condescends to admire a subject. The King copied it with his own hand. "A father," said he, addressing himself to the councillor of the parliament of Metz, "ought to rejoice in such a son."

This epistle was a promise of future favour, and a stimulant to ambition. The father understood it in that double sense, and the King was not long in justifying his expectations. He summoned Bossuet on every occasion to preach before him; henceforth no language appeared worthy of God and the King, except his.

The father of Bossuet having travelled to Paris to hear his son, he was pointed out to Louis XIV. amongst the congregation, his eyes wet with tears. "Ah!" exclaimed the King, "behold a father who is truly happy, thus to be a spectator of the sanctity and glory of his child!" A few days after, to complete the joy of the father, he himself conferred the bishopric of Condom on the son. At that time, ten years had passed since his name had resounded from the pulpits of Paris.

This new dignity did not entirely interfere with his sermons, it only added additional authority to the preacher, and gave more respect to public attention. Another orator took possession of the pulpit at the very moment when Bossuet abandoned it for the episcopal throne.

This orator was Bourdaloue. Eager comparisons were made between these two rivals in eloquence. To the shame of the time, it must be confessed, that the number of Bourdaloue's admirers exceeded, in a short time, those of Bossuet. The reason of this preference for

Digitized by Google

cold argument over impassioned eloquence must be sought in the nature of all human events. Men of moderate measure have more analogy with their contemporaries, are better understood and liked, than the giants who soar beyond comparisons. Cold argumentative reasoners are more intelligible to the crowd than the ardent spirits who kindle and blaze into enthusiasm Wings are required to follow the poetical orator, while a little logic suffices to keep pace with him who argues and explains; and logic is more commonly found in an audience than inspiration. All the world do not possess pinions to raise and sustain them in the wide expanse of imagination: this is the reason why, in the tribune of the National Assembly, Barnave was more admired than Mirabeau. These infatuations, which are the proofs of genius and the triumphs of emulation, cannot be considered as the decrees of posterity. Men of high pre-eminence can only be estimated by their peers. Equality of judgment and genius is too scantily bestowed in any living generation to ensure a correct decision, to settle the scale of pretension, to arrange the gradations of favour or the definitive title which each is to occupy in the ranks of glory. The gifted few are smothered by the ignorant multitude, who pronounce that to be the greatest which approaches the nearest to themselves, and which they look on with the distinctness of close proximity.

Several generations, and often many centuries, elapse before compeers and mates of these mighty exceptions arise, in sufficient number, to judge and form a tribunal competent to award the true meed of reputation. Until

Digitized by Google

that time the crowd deceives itself, and thus produces the mystery of posterity, that its judgments destroy those of time. To wait is the condition of fame.

Bourdaloue and Massillon have been pronounced, by contemporary authorities, greater orators in the pulpit than Bossuet; but the lapse of years has rectified this mistake. Bourdaloue was only a powerful reasoner; Massillon a melodious flatterer of the ear; Bossuet alone possessed all the combined attributes of eloquence, because he was at once poetical and pathetic, with the wings and shriek of an eagle: but he flew and cried too near to heaven to be heard by those below.

Madame de Sévigné, who has transmitted with so much grace the whisperings of one age to another, and whose work may be regarded as the ever-enduring gossip of posterity, speaks incessantly, in her Letters, of the harangues of Bourdaloue, but never, in a single instance, alludes to the discourses of Bossuet.

Up to the time when Bossuet was appointed Bishop of Condom by the King, his life at Paris had been of the same character as at Dijon or Metz, solitary, studious, and exemplary. He lived with the Abbé de Lameth, dean of the church of St. Thomas of the Louvre, whose house was a sort of half-way retreat between the monastery and the world, which prevented perfect asceticism of manners, by allowing the frequent visits of friends. The deportment of this great man was marked by that air of evangelical seriousness, which, according to Bruyère, constitutes the soul of Christian eloquence. He allowed none of his thoughts to escape carelessly. Several ecclesiastics of high birth,

Digitized by Google

consummate learning, and irreproachable conduct, the *élite* of the novitiates of the episcopacy, were his most frequent companions. The attraction of fame and virtue already made them gather round a man so prematurely celebrated. They appeared to foresee his coming renown, and to be honoured by the title of his disciples.

In these scholars Bossuet only recognised friends: amongst them were the Abbé d'Hoquincourt, afterwards Bishop of Verdun, and the Abbé de St. Laurent, preceptor to the Duke of Orléans, the future regent. This ecclesiastic inculcated principles of piety in the mind of the young prince before he became perverted by the infamous Dubois, whose vices raised him to a Cardinal's hat, in utter contempt of all decency.

The younger Racine relates pathetically, in one of his letters, the death of the Abbé de St. Laurent, who was torn from the arms of Bossuet. The circle of friends and pupils included M. de Bédacier, also Bishop of Auguste, who desired, when dying, to be consoled by the exhortations of Bossuet, and who left him a priory which he possessed at Mantes;—the Abbé Letellier, son of the chancellor of the same name, who loaded the young preacher with benefices and dignities, which he held in his gift as Bishop of Rheims;—the Abbé de Choisy, at first celebrated for light and scandalous conduct in his profession, but afterwards converted by Bossuet to a proper course of life and correct religious faith, and directed by him to the historical studies which might be useful to the church;—Hardouin de Perefixe, formerly preceptor to the King, then Archbishop of Paris:

Digitized by Google

Fénelon, at first pupil and afterwards rival of Bossuet, but who always retained towards him a kind and cordial feeling; all the young companions of Fénelon, drawn by him to that same warm worship of the heart which he rendered to Bossuet;—and above all, the Abbé Ledieu, who ate at his own table and became his confidant, secretary, and familiar during twenty years, and who noted down, day by day, for the advantage of posterity, the actions and words of his master.

This assembly of faith, philosophy, eloquence, conversation, and friendship, recalled the schools of the Athenian philosophers, rendered purer and more religious by the strictness of the Christian discipline which bound its members together. Bossuet never left it but to ascend the pulpit, or to cultivate some distinguished court favours which appertained to his dignity. After becoming a bishop, he preached less frequently on ordinary occasions, but reserved himself for those startling solemnities which his voice rendered epochs of eloquence.

He was tempted to try his powers in a new line of oratory, which recalled the panegyrics of the ancients,—in funeral sermons, a species of discourses well adapted, from their peculiar characteristics, to his genius; sermons of which the tribune was the tomb; the text, a memorable life, either tragic or saintly, terminated by a recent death,—and the ornamental appendages, a coffin.

While dealing with such subjects, all the accessories assisted the eloquence of the preacher,—sighs, external accompaniments, groans, consolations, cries, hymns

Digitized by Google

worthy of his voice. The temple hung with black, the uncovered altar, the funeral torches, the priests clothed in sombre vestments; the bier, surrounded by the family, friends, children, and servants of the deceased, overwhelmed with grief; the tears of nearest relations; the contrast between the greatness, power, and fame of the dead, and the inanimate corpse which had suddenly descended from the splendour of this life to take its place in a wooden coffin, to be for a moment the subject of a sermon and then for ever after the prey of the earth, already open to receive it; this daily change, sudden, but always impressive, from active life to the silent tomb; the reflections made aloud, as in ancient Egypt, upon the still warm memory of the dead, on the threshold of his sepulchre; the presumptuous foretelling of what the judgment of God may be at the moment when the fate of the departed has already been pronounced by an infallible Judge; the majestic or touching recital of the great events of this life; the accounts of history in the annals of one of the actors; the constant recurrence to religion the only apparent object of the discourse; the sadness of the last moments and recent farewells recounted amidst the sobs of those who felt the blank which the separation had left in their hearts; and finally, the tranquil and unchangeable voice of the priest, which rises superior to all these fleeting honours, vanities, and tears, which advises some to indulge in grief, others to seek consolation, and all to bow to the mysterious will of Omnipotence and the sovereign power of death. Such is the scene,

Digitized by Google

at the same time tragic, theatrical, and holy, which fascinated Bossuet, and made him resolve never thenceforth to place his foot, during these harangues, except upon a tomb, and only to address his audience when standing on the gulf which divides time from eternity.

This resolution was a proof of talent ; for the literary, historical, pathetic, and religious tone of these discourses enabled the orator to show himself a great artist without relinquishing the title of a great apostle. He executed with inimitable superiority of language, what he had conceived with such consummate sagacity. He lived in an age in which opportunities of praising, lamenting, and surprising were frequently afforded. The times abounded in great events and illustrious men : the eloquence of Bossuet, like the mourners of antiquity, followed them to the portals of the grave.

The friendship, or personal gratitude, which he bore to the memory of these great men, gave, in general, a more pathetic tone to his eulogiums. His heart mounted to his lips, and they felt that the orator experienced the same melancholy feelings with which he touched the souls of others. It was in this manner that he delivered, in 1667, the funeral sermon of Anne of Austria, the mother of Louis XIV. This Queen, who was at once beautiful, sensible, politic, tender, and pious, had been alternately the sport of all the fortunes and calamities of a court. Married to a husband who was cold, whimsical, and scrupulous, and who trembled before his minister, Cardinal Richelieu, she had been acquainted with nothing of the appurtenances of

Digitized by Google

queenly dignity beyond the suspicions and humiliations with which this haughty viceroy environed her, to fortify himself against the ascendancy of her youth and beauty.

A widow at an early age, and the mother of children whose tender years removed them far from the throne, the minority of her sons had proved a long and continued tempest, from which the manœuvres of Mazarin had with difficulty rescued their cradles. Attached from motives of policy, and perhaps of personal preference, to that agreeable and skilful minister, she had so mixed up her own fortunes with his, that she preferred exile in his company, to a throne, without him. Factions and the Fronde had tossed her to and fro, from insult to adoration, and from adoration to ingratitude. The King, having attained his majority, and Mazarin being dead, all that remained to her in this life were grief and resignation. A lingering and severe disease had long brought her to the brink of the grave, into which she had then recently descended. A wife, deprived of the love of an imbecile husband,—the disowned Queen of a turbulent people,—the friend of a minister hated by her subjects,—the mother of a King whose reign she had prepared by her constancy,—Anne of Austria had still to encounter the injustice of posterity in not being permitted, up to this time, to take that place in history which France is bound to accord to her amongst the most accomplished of her women, and the greatest of her queens. Bossuet himself did not even render her the justice or pay her the

Digitized by Google

homage to which she was entitled; but he at least remembered that she had been amongst the first of his patrons and admirers. He therefore owed her the earliest tribute of that commanding voice which she had recommended to the notice of her son. This sermon was not printed at the time. Tears shed over her misfortunes, and admiration of her piety, were the only eloquence in which the preacher indulged. Bossuet, in remembering virtue, forgot for the moment to be politic, but he was too much and too actively involved in the reign of the son to do justice to the mother.

On descending from the pulpit, he was made acquainted with the illness of his father: he flew to Metz to receive his last farewell.

The father of Bossuet had for some years past resigned his situation in the parliament to enter the church, under the auspices of his son. Bossuet, by his influence with the distributor of ecclesiastical benefices, had procured for his father a canonry at Metz. He looked upon the gifts of the church as a family patrimony, and he did not scruple to make use of them largely for the benefit of his own relatives. This arose less from cupidity than from the custom of the times. The altar, according to his notions, was bound to bestow honours upon, and largely remunerate the priest; he avowed repeatedly in letters to his friends—letters that we have at this instant under our eye—his strong conviction of the necessity that the preacher of the sacred word should live in easy circumstances.

"As for me," said he, "my mind would not have

Digitized by Google

free scope if it were trammelled by the cares of a narrow and uncertain income. He who is called upon to think for others should not be obliged, from personal embarrassments, to narrow his sphere and mind by dwelling incessantly upon the abject necessities of life." Such is the sense, and almost the literal interpretation of his letters, written with the frankness of a man who feels himself superior to fortune, but who appreciates her benefits, not as a conditional enjoyment, but as an inheritance of liberty.

Bossuet himself administered the last sacraments to his father, mingling tears with his prayers, uniting the character of son and priest, and thus guiding to immortality the author of his own existence.

Upon his return to Paris, after this domestic calamity, he became involved, with passionate zeal, in the violent controversies of the day between the Protestants and Jansenists. These new apostles, inspired by Arnaud, Nicole, and Pascal, in fighting against a schism, threatened the Church with a sect. Men of cenobitic piety, rigid virtue, inflexible reason, and resistless eloquence, they carried virtue to an exaggerated excess: they were the Lacedemonians of Christianity, and frightened others by their overpowering sanctity. It was pretended that texts had been found, in the works of the founder, Jansenius, contrary to orthodoxy,—texts which some affirmed to exist in the writings of the Dutch doctor, but which his followers totally denied. From thence arose innumerable quarrels, which were fomented by the interference of the government.

Digitized by Google

Bossuet, to his own misfortune, began from this time to take part in these scholastic quarrels, and to devote his genius and character to polemical disputes. At first he inclined towards the Jansenists, from analogy of disposition and virtue; but soon the two predominant feelings of his nature — belief in the supreme authority of the Church and the King — rose above all discrepancies of doctrine, and removed him from the men of his heart and choice, to render him an extreme partisan of the established authorities.

We shall allude but little to these controversies, in which his great talent was lost in the nothingness of the disputes: his eloquence recalled him to the pulpit, his true pedestal.

He re-ascended it to lament the Queen of England, the widow of Charles I., who had been exiled to France by the murder of her husband. "The daughter, wife, sister, and mother of kings, her life," said Bossuet, "exhibited every phase of human existence." The King charged him to suffer his eloquence to ascend to the grandeur and misfortunes of her peculiar destiny.

Louis XIV., having treated this proscribed Queen with royal hospitality at St. Germain during her life, could not, at her death, employ a more worthy instrument in her commemoration than the voice of Bossuet. This funeral sermon was the first in which he fully developed all the grandeur of soul, all the knowledge of character, and all the rich variety of language, with which nature, study, and his profession, had endowed him. It comprised an entire course of history and politics delivered with the majestic flight of an eagle.

Digitized by Google

Bossuet, in referring back the causes of the regicide of Charles I. to the schism of Henry VIII., put forth, upon the fatal union of priesthood and empire, of Church and state, truths which he was soon himself to deny in serving the Church, by the King's sword, and in strengthening the King, by compelling the Church to submit to regal authority.

"What," said he, "is the episcopacy, when it separates itself from the Church, which is its all, and from Rome, which is its centre, to attach itself, contrary to its nature, to royalty? These two powers, of so different an order, never agree, but mutually embarrass each other when they become mixed together. Religion is weakened when it is changed and deprived of a certain weight, which alone is able to control nations. People feel in the recesses of their hearts an indescribable uneasiness if this curb is taken from them; and there is nothing left by which they can be governed, when they are permitted to be masters of their own religion. Everything combines to produce revolt and seditious feelings when the supreme authority of the Church is annihilated."

The entire religious and political character of Bossuet is exhibited in these sentences, of which the first agrees so little with the last. As a priest, he commences by declaring with truth, that religion has nothing to receive from the civil power, and that these two dominant principles change their nature when they combine. As a politician, he declares, in the second sentence, that governments cannot allow the people full liberty

Digitized by Google

of conscience without weakening their own temporal authority: he invested these two contradictions with the same majesty of eloquence. They could already see the man who would soon advise the King to rise in respectful but inflexible rebellion against Rome, and to found a Gallican church, or rather to establish independence in submission and disruption in unity.

The servant of God disappeared from this time in the servant of the prince; and, finally, the man of discipline became absorbed in the man of power. This worldly view of religious ascendancy, as alone able to command the allegiance of the people,—this necessary curb,—this attempt at despotic rule over the consciences in order to secure the state from revolutions and seditions,—are maxims which savour more of the impiety of Machiavel than of the faith of Bossuet.

We again find this political fatalism in the portrait of Cromwell, in whom Bossuet, following the example of his time, could see only a hypocrite. He feared to praise him too much, from respect to the memory of the Queen, his victim; and he also restrained his censure, lest he should offend the King, who had treated with the dictator. He plunged into the theocracy which explains, excuses, and legitimatizes everything, and exclaimed aloud with the despotic enthusiasm of the prophet, "When God has chosen any one to be the instrument of his purposes, nothing can arrest his course. He blinds, enchains, and subjugates all that is capable of offering resistance."

It is from this description of Cromwell, this sophis-

Digitized by Google

tical argument that Providence is the accomplice of victory, that modern theocrats, such as M. de Maistre and his followers, have derived their immoral admiration for power,—an impiety under the guise of religion, which induces man to bow before success instead of relying upon justice. These mistaken interpreters of the decrees of providence, place the design of God in the event and not in the moral rectitude of the act. The danger of a superior mind, such as that of Bossuet, promulgating a maxim so false to the world, consists in this, that inferior intelligences adopt it as an authority, and the judgment of the million is governed by a mistaken principle. It is thus that theocracy destroys, in the name of God, his most noble work, the knowledge of good and evil in the human race.

This discourse, in its pathetic portions, overflowed with dignity, feeling, and sublime regrets and exhortations. Bossuet appeared to paint his own portrait in speaking of the melancholy poet Jeremiah, "who alone," said he, "could raise his lamentations to the height of the calamities he bewailed." A cry of admiration rose from the entire court and church at the delivery of this sermon. No modern preacher had hitherto spoken with the tone and authority of a prophet; they besought Bossuet to publish such a masterpiece of eloquence. All Europe was moved, and wept.

Six days later, a young and fascinating princess, daughter of her whose memory had just been commemorated by Bossuet, and of the unfortunate Charles I.,

Digitized by Google

summoned the orator to another coffin, that of this princess herself. Henrietta of England had married the Duke of Orléans, the King's brother, a prince of a mean mind and depraved habits, who was incapable of appreciating so much grace and beauty in the person of his wife: he had all the vices of the race of Valois. Henrietta died suddenly at St. Cloud, without proof, but not without suspicion, of poison. The instruments of the Duke's vicious tastes were accused of having caused the death of his wife that they might rule without a rival over the senses and heart of their master. The King had felt for Henrietta of England one of those warm friendships that relationship alone deterred from becoming love. This passion, thus curbed, had softened into tenderness. The death of the Duchess of Orleans struck the King to the heart; she was the sunbeam of the court, and the light of the firmament was obscured when this star disappeared in the darkness of a single night. Bossuet loved her for her genius and misfortunes; and she admired Bossuet as the living miracle of Europe. She had often said to him, when half-jesting with serious reflections, "If I die, speak of me to God and men; I desire no other praise than your friendship,—no other apotheosis than your tears."

The King sent to entreat Bossuet to preach her funeral sermon. His heart was as much softened as his voice: it was the most touching of all his discourses; antiquity has not left us its equal. "I am about to show you, Christians," said he, "in a single

Digitized by Google

death, the decease and annihilation of all human grandeur."

To move the feelings of his auditory, Bossuet had only to recollect; he needed not to draw upon his imagination. Henrietta, feeling that she was about to die, had repeatedly asked for him, that his presence might support her in her passage from earth to heaven. Bossuet, who was found rather late at Paris, flew to her in the middle of the night; he threw himself on his knees at the foot of the princess's bed, and wept, prayed with, and consoled her until day. He received her last confession and expiring sigh.

The moment before she died, Henrietta beckoned one of her women to her, and addressing her in English, so as not to be understood by Bossuet, said, "When I am dead, take this emerald from my finger and give it to this holy bishop, as a token of remembrance." This scene of agony, which was one of terror and pity to others, furnished to Bossuet a sweet and tender recollection. He repeated what he had already seen; he again felt what he had felt before, and admired what he had previously looked on with admiration. His words brought before the listeners the tumult of a palace awakened by the approach of death, the surprise of the servants, the eagerness of friends, the sobs of the women, the astonishment of the unconcerned. The cry re-echoed from the Court to the city, "*She is dying! she is dead!*"—a cry, the suddenness of which left no time to avert the blow, nor room to indulge hope: all felt as if they were

Digitized by Google

present at this overwhelming removal of a woman to whom heaven had only accorded a few minutes to ripen for eternity. "These brief hours," said Bossuet, "piously spent amidst the hardest trials, are of as much importance as if they embraced an age. The time was short, I admit, but the work of grace was strong, and the co-operation of the soul was complete. Grace sometimes chooses to bring to perfection, in a single day, that which it often takes a life-time to accomplish."

"No," resumed he, after several bursts of reflection upon the advantages of birth, rank, beauty, and charms, and of such a death,—"No, after what we have just seen, we must feel that health exists only in name, that life is a dream, glory a deception, favours and pleasures dangerous amusements, everything about us vanity. She was as gentle towards death as she had been to all the world. I beheld her feeble hand, after having fallen to her side, trying, with renewed strength, once more to make upon her lips the sign of our redemption."

"Behold, notwithstanding this great heart," continued he, "behold her such as death has made her. There still remains to us what will soon fade away, and we shall see her deprived even of this sad ornament (he alluded to the funeral canopy). She is about to descend to sombre places and subterranean abodes, where she will sleep with the great ones of the earth, with princes and kings, whose power is at an end, amongst whom there is hardly room to be found, so closely do they lie together, and so prompt is death to

Digitized by Google

fill the vacant places. *Can we build our hopes on ruins such as these?*"

Then, passing from elegy to Christian reflection, "Grandeur and glory!" cried he, "can we still pronounce such names in the presence of triumphant death? No; I can no longer endure these high words by which human arrogance seeks to blind itself to its own nonentity! What is birth, grandeur, mind, when death equalizes all, governs all, and when, with a prompt and sovereign power, it overturns the mightiest heads? What! will nothing enable us to foresee that which is so near? Will the worshippers of human greatness be satisfied with their fortune when, in an instant, they may see their glory pass with their names, their titles descend to the tomb, their wealth to the ungrateful, and their dignities perhaps to those who envied them?"

These thoughts carried him beyond the earth, and made him look upon all vanities and all griefs with an eye of pity, compassion, and contempt. He commended that dust to God which yesterday was moved by pride and vanity, and called upon them to pray for the soul of the departed, as the greatest proof of friendship which survivors can show to the deceased. At length he concluded, leaving his auditors in that state of reflection and silence in which we fear to allow the sound of our footsteps to echo through the open sepulchre, or to breathe too loud lest the dead should hear us.

Where else can we find this scene, actor, pulpit, or

Digitized by Google

voice, in the annals of human genius? Bossuet had embodied the cold shudder of death and the eloquence of eternity.

The orator himself felt the impression that his own feelings had made upon the feelings of others.

The Abbé de Rancé, his old fellow-student, whose mind, like every volatile disposition, was ardent and extreme, had changed from a voluptuary to an ascetic, and had buried himself in the living tomb of the Monastery of La Trappe. There this solitary, like St. Jerome, fostered his lugubrious piety by the contemplation of human skulls, which had been emptied by the worms of the sepulchre. Bossuet, making an animated allusion to this furniture of the convert's cell, wrote thus: "I send you two funeral sermons, which, as they show the nothingness of the world, may take their place amongst the books of an anchorite; at any rate they may be looked upon as *two skulls of the dead, equally affecting and instructive.*"

We discover the artist, in this solemn jocularity, judging himself with partial complaisance as a Christian panegyrist. This insignificance of worldly things was not only with him a subject of meditation, but a text on which he could display his powers of eloquence; in fact he followed with the same even step his double vocation—of the saint, who was pursuing the path to heaven, and of the politician, who was travelling on the road to power. Louis XIV., who was reminded of Bossuet by these numerous oratorical triumphs, appointed him, after this sermon, preceptor to his son.

Digitized by Google

The Archbishop of Paris, Péréfixe, and the Chancellor Letellier, had recommended him for the office. The Duke de Montausier, the young Prince's governor, a man jealous of favours, but more devoted to piety, seconded the ambition of Bossuet. The King received him graciously; for, although he did not like genius to be too close to him, lest his royal greatness should be compared with that natural dignity which might readily evince its superiority, he loved to see talent devoted to his service as a power, which, being subordinate to his own, would extend and strengthen the sovereign authority.

The Court was anxious that this young heir to the throne should be moulded by the hands of the bishops, that another reign might thus be secured to the Church. Louis XIV. entered into this plan as much from conviction as from policy. Brought up in the Italian and Spanish school of piety by his mother, he disputed no form of faith that left him free licence to follow his own inclinations. This was the moment when Madame de Montespan, his idol, reigned, after her three sisters, over the heart and court of the King. Nothing has ever equalled the scandal of these open intrigues, which audaciously substituted, before the eyes of the nation, army, and people, and even in the Queen's carriage, concubines in the place of the King's wife.

Louis XIV. wished to be adored even in the indulgence of his vices. No individual has ever done so much to corrupt the manners of the people by his

Digitized by Google

example as this monarch, because no man ever before mixed up licentiousness with religion, and by his royal authority caused the most scandalous acts to be received as respectable. The favourite sultana, upon being consulted, also declared herself for the selection of Bossuet. Almost a queen, she thought with the impressions of a sovereign, and the acquisition of so illustrious a partisan flattered her pride.

Who would dare to breathe a whisper against a court whose proceedings the most saintly orator of the age authorized by his presence and silence? The King, to indemnify the new preceptor of his son for the loss of the bishopric of Condom, gave him the Abbey of Saint-Lucien, near Beauvais, a benefice with an annual income of twenty thousand livres, inherited from Cardinal Mancini.

A murmur against this addition of fortune was raised even amongst the friends of Bossuet. He felt that he was called on to explain it in a letter to the Maréchal de Bellefonds, before whom he thought aloud with rare sincerity.

"I do not expect," said Bossuet, "any congratulations upon my worldly prosperity; and the abbey which the King has bestowed upon me, relieves me from embarrassments and cares which would soon disagree with the thoughts that I ought to entertain. Do not fear that I shall increase my expenses; those of the table neither suit my position nor inclination. I shall pay my debts as soon as I can. *Benefices* are undoubtedly intended for those who serve the Church.

Digitized by Google

As long as I have only what is necessary to keep up my position, I do not see that I ought to have any scruples; and as for what is needful to maintain this station, it is difficult exactly to determine, because there are so many unforeseen expenses. I do not care for riches, but I am not sufficiently clever yet to find that I have everything I require when I have only bare necessaries, and I should lose more than half of my intellectual power if I were straitened in my domestic affairs. I shall endeavour to make every action of my life redound to the edification of the Church. I know in several things I have been blamed. I love regularity; but there are certain situations in which it is far from desirable to observe it strictly."

Although his life was irreproachable, sober, and exempt from vulgar cupidity, we see that Bossuet sought in the world the space, liberty, and grandeur which he felt in his own soul. Liberal of his personal efforts to serve the Church and the monarch, he thought that these powers should be liberal to him in return. He did not sell his services, but he felt their value.

This new office at court, by placing him at the source of favour, still further raised his fortune and credit. This did not cause him to neglect his duties as the preceptor of a prince whose age, character, and inaptitude responded so little to his tutor's sublimity. The labours of Bossuet to prepare for his pupil well-digested elements of human knowledge, though immense, were fruitless. From forty-five to fifty-five

Digitized by Google

years of age, Bossuet retraced the studies of his whole life that he might impart them to a child. He put forth all these lessons in a single treatise called 'A Discourse on Universal History,' just as Fénelon afterwards displayed his imagination and feeling, for the benefit of another child, in another book, entitled 'Telemachus.' These two instructors of princes, thus showing what they were themselves, the one in history, the other in poetry, displayed the true characteristics of their separate minds. The 'Discourse upon Universal History,' notwithstanding the advantage that reality possesses over romance, and the superiority of the essayist over the poet, will be a less lasting monument of the education of the Dauphin, than 'Telemachus' will continue to be of that of the Duke of Burgundy. The 'Discourse' is only a theory of the brain, while 'Telemachus' is a picture of nature: theories pass away, but nature remains immutable.

The well-founded impression of his great genius as an orator has, according to our ideas, up to the present time, given too favourable an opinion of the work of Bossuet as to his pretensions as an historian. History narrates, but does not reflect. Bossuet always reflects, and never narrates. He generalizes too much to enter into detail, and looks from too great a height and distance to paint events otherwise than collectively and in the mass. He could design historical charts of the world; but he was unable to write that truthful drama which is called history,—a drama in which nations, men, and circumstances, trace their real character,

Digitized by Google

their souls, and true forms on nature, and imprint in admiration, pity, tears, and blood, a living reflex on the memory through the emotions of the heart. Thus, where the feeling of the reader is not strongly excited, there will be no memory, and without memory there can be no history and no instruction.

The 'Discourse on Universal History' is not therefore a recital, but a catalogue of nations, names of persons, and events, grouped undoubtedly with an admirable mechanism of system in some pages, but passing across the mind like confused shadows without leaving a more durable impression than that caused by their multitude, rapidity, and dazzling brilliancy. In reading it, we may arrive at a confused general idea of universal history, but we can never attain profound knowledge, much less a clear and distinct perception. This book resembles Michael Angelo's painting of 'The Last Judgment,' on the cupola of the Vatican, in which there are positions, attitudes, muscles, busts, faces and limbs of men, thrown together, by a gigantic pencil, in a confused mass on the wall. Angels, gods, the devil-possessed, even hell itself, are there, but there is no illustration of human nature. The mind experiences a similar sensation on reading the recital which Bossuet has called history. Everything is seen, but nothing is distinguished, and still less felt. What, then, can be recollected? It may be a geographical map, but it is not the earth. Bossuet is a geographer, he is not an historian. But if this book, hitherto too highly esteemed, is of no value in teaching history, it

Digitized by Google

is not inferior to its reputation for the philosophy of its pages. By philosophy we mean that true moral and civilizing deduction which ought to emanate from such a sublime and diversified narrative, to enlighten the intellect and improve the mind; as light arose from chaos at the voice of the sovereign Creator of all things, or as the catastrophe springs from the drama to convey a moral to the spectator. This profound philosophy almost invariably fails in the picture drawn by Bossuet, as it appears also to be foreign to the nature of the historian.

Why is this philosophy so completely wanting in the 'Discourse upon Universal History'? It is because Bossuet, in composing it, instead of writing as a man, endeavoured to render himself the organ of Divinity. This book is the offspring of a superhuman pride. *Universal History* is a mystery; but Bossuet has attempted to reduce it to a system. He wished to tear the veil from the countenance and thoughts of God which are incomprehensible to our limited intelligence. Instead of this, he should have bowed before the Divine incomprehensibility, which becomes the more sublime as it demonstrates our insignificance; he should have retraced, with holy respect, all the vestiges that time has left us; he should have shown on the one hand the cradles, and on the other, the tombs of nations, the different races, religious institutions, virtues, errors, and crimes of mankind, and should thus have said to us, "Behold what I know I am, ignorant of all else: these are the beginnings and boundaries of that horizon

Digitized by Google

from whence I am trying to collect some steps of humanity on the route of ages; the more distant traces escape beyond my feeble vision: to describe all, we must see all. God alone can accomplish this, and He alone knows from whence we come and whither we go. Blind under his all-searching eye, our anterior state of being is his secret; our future destination is his mystery. He has given us a light to guide us in the dark windings of our path—conscience! This light is brief, but our existence is also short, and it suffices to illumine our few steps in this world of mud. As for the universal and eternal light of history, which ought to enlighten successive centuries, and guide mankind where it will and as it will, He has not ordained nor given it to us,—it belongs to Himself alone: we should be blinded by its effulgence, and any attempt to borrow it from Him would be presumption, while to use it would be impiety. We are but atoms: He alone is infinite!"

This, according to our idea, is the language which Bossuet ought to have adopted, had he written his 'Discourse upon Universal History' in the character of a man. But, we repeat with grief, he did not compose with the feelings of a human being: he sought to write under the inspiration of a prophet. Far from placing himself for the purposes of examination and recital in the position of the mere insect, which can only grasp a single point of time, space, and matter,—he has endeavoured to ascend to the immeasurable height of the Infinite, whose eye embraces and sees

Digitized by Google

everything: this pride has obscured his sight. He forgets that for God, who is unlimited, the centre is everywhere, and the circumference becomes a centre. Instead of causing stars, worlds, creations, events, and things, to circulate round the eternal and ineffable axis of the universe,—which is as ever-enduring and unbounded as the Creator Himself,—he has made all history revolve round a single people, whose destinies, great in faith and futurity, are limited in events that have actually taken place, and occupy but a small space in the record. Bossuet has endeavoured to invent a plan for the Creator, and to compel, by the force of his own human will, heaven and earth, empires and kingdoms, the past and the future, to enter together into his historical frame, admirably executed, but conceived with little philosophy: heaven, earth, empires, men, things, probability, reason, history, truth, have resisted this coercive impulse of human pride: the Deity has remained omnipotent, and Bossuet has continued a man. This Titanic dream has left only a beautiful vestige.

Another ingenious sophism has been added to history, but the Divine scheme remains hid behind that holy shadow under which God conceals his thoughts.

Such is the 'Discourse upon Universal History,' the plaything of a powerful imagination, but still a plaything, which occupied the mature age of a great mind in writing, with mortal fingers, upon sand, the immutable and eternal plan of creation.

One point alone is worthy of Bossuet in this cata-

Digitized by Google

logue of nations, bound together by an imaginary thread, and that exception is the style. Never has the enduring text of the fickleness of human vanities been expounded with superior majesty or more expressive regret. No other human hand has turned with a louder report or more rapid evolution, that wheel of fortune, which raises or humbles, supports or abandons, crowns with success or overthrows men, races, empires, and nations. Bossuet is the great interpreter of the insignificance of humanity. He appears to delight, like a child upon the edge of a well, in precipitating religious institutions, dynasties, and all that is usually considered fixed and immutable, to the bottom of the abyss, that he may hear the noise of their fall, and cause the echoes of eternity to ascend from thence to the ears of men.

Bossuet wished to complete this work by drawing also from the Bible, for the instruction of his pupil, a political theory adapted to the use of kings, which he entitled, 'Sacred Policy.' This treatise is little more than a learned and dogmatical commentary upon Holy Writ, to justify the absolute authority of princes over the people, in their own eyes,—a theory of the right of force, in which the law of violence and conquest is rendered justifiable, provided it becomes legitimized by the undisturbed possession of what has been originally acquired by robbery. Bossuet, in this essay, allows no other judge to kings than God, interpreted through the priesthood. His religious policy is merely theocracy without appeal to the conscience, reason, or con-

Digitized by Google

sent of subjects. All human liberty is there annihilated by the unquestionable power assigned to earthly monarchs by the King of kings. Alternately a prophet and a politician, Bossuet, it is true, professes now and then in this work, some of the brotherly doctrines of the Gospel,—that code of justice, clemency, and freedom, so directly opposed to his own. He advises kings to convert tyranny into a paternal but absolute authority,—which bestows all as a gift, but owes nothing as a debt, to humanity.

These two books, 'Sacred Policy' and 'Universal History,' added to instructions of the same nature, by which the preceptor of the heir of Louis XIV. accompanied his texts, were not, as we may readily observe, calculated to form a king according to the heart of Christ, or even after the heart of Fénelon : moreover, every defect in this mode of education ran contrary to nature. The pupil, tired of his masters, neglected by his parent, and kept thus zealously within a wall of etiquette, fears, and formalities, which gave no scope for the play of his natural faculties, remained the first slave in his father's dominions, without taste for literature, ambition, or glory, without the desire of mounting the throne, or a leading object in life. Banished from early youth to perfect retirement at Meudon, the Dauphin only cultivated his animal passions, resigned himself to inferiority, and died young, already tired of having lived too long.

Bossuet, in some of his confidential letters, complained bitterly of this apathy in his pupil; but he

Digitized by Google

himself may be accused of an error in his system of education, for the Dauphin was neither deficient in intelligence nor feeling. A Fénelon might, perhaps, have made him a second Marcellus; but Bossuet, in bringing up the son, occupied himself much more with the father: the youth and health of the King promised the tutor long years of personal influence.

This power was already confirmed by frequent private intercourse with the King, and recognised by the clergy who surrounded him. Bossuet, at Versailles, held more the rank of a minister than that of a preceptor. His table was well regulated, and splendid. All were eager to crowd his apartments, as the source from whence favours flowed: and when he walked in the gardens, a select cohort of prelates and ecclesiastics formed an escort around him, which resembled a court. The alley in the small park, in which he conversed with them while taking exercise, was called "the Philosophers" Walk.' These philosophers, disciples, and courtiers of the modern Plato (amongst whom was a second founder of the Academics), were Fénelon, Pellison, the Abbé de Langeron, the most tender of friends, who died of grief at the death of his master,—Bruyère, the Molière of didactic and epigrammatic character,—the Abbé de Longuerue, a studious orator and writer;—Fleury, the historian of the Church, and many other priests and laymen, who grouped round Bossuet as their centre, and constituted with him the charm, the might, the freedom, and the influence of these delightful associations.

Digitized by Google

"What true pleasure there is in the society of so great a man!" wrote the Abbé de Choisy, who had abjured the frivolities of youth for the purer enjoyments of riper age: "what equanimity in his temperament! what fascination in his words! If the superiority of his genius had not commanded notoriety, his modesty and simplicity of character would have caused him to be forgotten."

These conversations often glided from holy to profane subjects; and the verses of Homer, Virgil, and Horace echoed from the lips of Bossuet in the alleys of Versailles. Dissertations and commentaries on the Bible, the prophets, and the sacred poets, were included in the subjects discussed in these promenades. Bossuet was soon drawn from them by polemical disputes with a celebrated Protestant minister named Claude. He maintained, in argument with Claude, his doctrine of rigorous obedience to authority. "No individual," said he, "has ever the right of separating himself from the church." "But," replied the Protestant minister, "when Jesus Christ appeared at Jerusalem, the synagogue was the church, and the synagogue did not recognise the truth in Christ. If one person, therefore, separating himself from the synagogue, had then declared that Jesus was the Messiah, would he not have placed himself in opposition to the church?" Bossuet demolished the argument by declaring that "from the moment when Jesus appeared, He Himself alone became the synagogue and the church!"

These conferences, in which each arrogated to him-

Digitized by Google

self the victory, were useless encounters of argumentative ability. The King's authority assigned the triumph beforehand to his pontiff, and power established principle. They were subsequently published by Bossuet.

It was not long before the vicissitudes of the King's attachments called Bossuet to more delicate mediations between the ardour, coldness, religious repentance, and returns of passion in the hearts of the prince and the two jealous favourites. The King, after having long adored Mademoiselle de la Vallière, the most interesting victim of his fascination, began to devote himself to Madame de Montespan, the most imperious of all his mistresses. Mademoiselle de la Vallière, alternately hoping and despairing to recover the heart of Louis XIV., fluctuated between the court and the cloister: the King retained her more from pride than tenderness. He felt humiliated at the scandal which the flight of his favourite to a convent might attach to his inconstancy; he refused to grant his permission to Mademoiselle de la Vallière, still young and beautiful, to bury herself in a living tomb; he felt that the indignation of the world would be loudly expressed at this cruel sacrifice. On the other hand, he was too much enamoured of Madame de Montespan to sacrifice her to a propriety or a scruple. These domestic mysteries, which the modesty of history scarcely ventures to investigate and lay open in the present day, formed at that time the common topic of conversation in the court.

Changes in the King's tastes were revolutions in the State. Louis XIV., as we have seen in the life of Féne-

Digitized by Google

lon, felt nothing of the personal shame of vice : there was so great a distance between the monarch and his subjects, that the morality and religion of the people scarcely dared to utter complaints at the feet of the King ; they respected everything connected with him, even to his intrigues, which in their estimation formed a portion of the right divine. The people lamented and complained, but did not presume to pronounce a judgment. The strictest ministers of the church lived in this atmosphere of criminal indulgence : they drew a veil over their eyes that they might not behold such glaring violations of the sanctity of their order. The King employed them, sometimes to discuss, and more frequently to extenuate, his transgressions. To Bossuet was assigned the task of relieving him of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, who began to be troublesome, and to force this forsaken mistress, with the energy of his inflexible piety, into a convent ; thus, without being aware of it, leaving the King to the ascendant influence of another goddess, Madame de Montespan, unimpeded by a dangerous rival. He thus gained the gratitude of all three : the King owed him his liberty, Madame de Montespan her undisputed sway, and to Mademoiselle de la Vallière he had opened the road to heaven. The details of this negotiation, in which the apostle, contrary to his own desire, proved himself the most consummate of courtiers, are too long to be inserted here. The bishop himself settled with Madame de Montespan the conditions of her rival's retirement. But the new favourite refused to consent to the rigor-

Digitized by Google

ous incarceration of her predecessor; she considered the example dangerous for herself, in case her own turn should subsequently arrive.

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière," wrote Bossuet, "has compelled me to arrange her future position with Madame de Montespan. Her retirement is little thought of, but some objection has been raised to the place. The Convent of the Carmelites sounds terrible, and the extreme choice has even been made a subject of ridicule. The King is well aware that I have been spoken to on the subject, but, as he has said nothing, I have held my peace. My advice to Mademoiselle de la Vallière is to complete the sacrifice speedily."

He then eulogizes, in the following exclamations, the courage of the victim:—"Her strength and tranquillity," thus he wrote to the pious Maréchal de Bellefonds, "increase in proportion as the moment draws near. I cannot think of it without beholding the wonderful workings of grace! I trace the finger of Heaven in the composure and humility which pervade all her thoughts, and with which I am equally delighted and astonished. *I speak, but she acts; I have exhortations to produce, but she has works!* When I think of these, I feel inclined to hide myself and be silent. Miserable channel, through which heavenly waters flow, while it scarcely retains a few drops!"

He then set the seal upon the tomb of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, by an admirable homily, a funeral sermon upon a living beauty.

This discourse of Bossuet was a scene rather than

Digitized by Google

a simple oration, and so thoroughly dramatic, that Madame de Sévigné, in the light gossiping style of the time, wrote, that mere words could not sufficiently characterize it. The listeners thought more of the palpitations of the victim's heart, than of the studied periods of the preacher; for no language can so deeply touch the soul, or resound so loudly, as the sobs of unrestrained affliction. This beautiful being, still in the flower of her age, torn and consumed in the spring-time of life by that fire which she had herself created, and which she could not extinguish in her own bosom,—tarnished by enjoyment won at the sacrifice of moral principle, which degraded while it raised her,—betrayed by the inconstancy of her lover, and thrown, by his ingratitude, into a tomb with a still fervent heart,—covered by the Queen herself, whom she had injured, with the mortuary veil which enveloped her with shame and pardon in the presence of that court, yesterday the witnesses of her triumph, and to day the spectators of her interment;—and finally, Bossuet in the pulpit, to give the weight of oratory to all the wounds and silent sufferings of her heart. What more could Madame de Sévigné desire? Did she not feel that eloquence must be suspended and paralysed on the lips, when the faculties of feeling and expression so thoroughly absorb the hearts of an auditory? Notwithstanding which, the eloquence of Bossuet was not even then arrested.

"The silence," said he, with a visible effort, that seemed to tear the words from his soul, "which has

Digitized by Google.

lasted for many years, must be broken, and a voice, which the pulpit no longer recognizes, must be heard. What have we beheld, and what do we now behold? What a change between that which has been and that which is! I need not speak, facts declare themselves," and he pointed to the kneeling female, clothed in a shroud, like a corpse. Then, as if interrupting his own train of thought, he turned towards the Queen, and said, "Madam, look there! behold an object worthy the eyes of so pious and gracious a sovereign!'

Then resuming his subject, he called the attention of his deeply-affected listeners from the scene before them, and transferred it to those exalted considerations which embody the morality of human tears. "Religious sentiments," said he, "are the last to be effaced from the heart of man; nothing is more commonly excited, and, at the same time, nothing is so seldom changed. Is this a prodigy or an enigma in human nature? or is it not rather, if I may so speak, a remnant of what man once was, a vestige of his origin, a ruined edifice, which, even in its destroyed and crumbling walls, retains some of the beauty and grandeur of its first form? Man has been overthrown by his own depraved will, the roof has fallen upon the walls, and the walls upon the foundations; but when the ruins are removed, they find in the remains of the upturned edifice the plan of the original design, and the hand of the architect. The impress of Divinity is so strong that man cannot lose it entirely, while, at the same time, it is so feeble that he cannot follow it:

Digitized by Google

it appears to be permitted to remain, only to convince him of his fall, and to render him sensible of the punishment!"

What more majestic or more pathetic philosophy could be deduced from such a scene, thus commented upon by a lofty ecclesiastic; and what emotion could surpass his address to the guilty penitent, already half-buried before his eyes:—"And you, victim of remorse, descend,—go to the altar; finish your sacrifice. The fire is lighted, the incense is ready, the sword is drawn! the sword is the vow which you are about to pronounce,—the vow which separates your soul from this world, and unites it indissolubly and exclusively to God!"

What superhuman efforts were expected of Bossuet, if words such as these did not reach the measure of public expectation!

Mademoiselle de la Vallière entered her living sepulchre as he spoke, and passed there nearly forty years in a melancholy period of transition between two deaths.

But Bossuet had not accomplished his work by placing the first favourite on the road to heaven by means of the second. He wished, in addition, to purify the court, and to tear Madame de Montespan also from the King's embraces.

Louis XIV. struggled between the passion which he had long felt for this woman, and the scruples of conscience excited by Bossuet; and made, or feigned to make, efforts, which ended in throwing him back more firmly than ever under the yoke of his idol.

Digitized by Google

Already several children, raised to the rank of legitimate princes, attested the constancy, and almost the insolence, of this passion. The Queen was dead, but Madame de Montespan's husband still lived. No union, not even a secret one, could palliate the crime. The King tried several times to excuse the residence of his mistress at Versailles by affirming that love, repressed or extinguished, removed all impropriety from his platonic attachment to her. Sometimes, on religious anniversaries, he sent her away for a few days, that her presence in the palace might not provoke the clergy to interdict him from participating in the sacraments.

On another side, a woman, whose character has remained an enigma, so much self-interest is mingled with her virtue, and such true piety with her ambition, Madame de Maintenon, insinuated herself, by the most feminine art, into the presence, mind, and habits of the King. This exceedingly clever woman bore still, in her name of the widow of Scarron, and friend of the courtesan Ninon, the stigma of her obscurity and recent narrow circumstances. Madame de Montespan, unsuspecting the ambitious views of her *protégée*, but charmed by her wit and touched by her misfortunes, had placed her close to her own person and that of the King by entrusting to her the care of her children. From the situation of *confidante*, Madame Scarron became a rival; her matured beauty, calm sense, retiring graces, and apparently involuntary attractions; her placarded piety, although indulgent

Digitized by Google

to the weaknesses of her master and protectress; and lastly, that unaccountable caprice of passion which seizes men in the satiety of gratified attachment, and which makes them perceive unexpected charms in the discovery of beauty hitherto unacknowledged by themselves and others: all this began to create vague inclinations in the heart of the King towards this female, whose position placed her so far below the throne. Madame de Maintenon appeared to him like a delicious repose of the heart after the tumult of excited passions. Her very reserve and severity were acceptable to him; he loved to be respectfully reprimanded by her upon the irregular emotions of his soul. She called religion to her aid in urging him, unknown to Madame de Montespan, to break off for ever this connexion, criminal in the eyes of God, although of daily recurrence in the ways of men. She gained ground upon his feeling through his conscience. Retained at court, by the charge of the King's children, during the compulsory absences of the mother, the governess possessed the royal ear at all hours. She was well acquainted with the vexatious bitternesses which accompanied the stormy intercourse of the King and Madame de Montespan, and she united with the clergy in urging the monarch to take refuge in devotion; he would thus be delivered up to her without a rival. She knew the influence that Bossuet possessed over the conscience of Louis XIV., through the part he had taken in the seclusion of Mademoiselle de la Vallière. She disliked his superior genius, of which

Digitized by Google

by instinct she dreaded the haughty severity and imperious control. She was too acute a politician to admit a second Cardinal Richelieu for a single day between her and the King. She secretly and indirectly opposed the presentation of a man to the Pope, who was so worthy of the Cardinal's robe; but for the accomplishment of the scheme she had woven, to separate Madame de Montespan from the King, she united herself to Bossuet. She wrote at this time to a confidential correspondent: "Bossuet has not a genius for politics: he is ever destined to be the dupe of the court."

This judgment was erroneous, as are all interested opinions. The genius of Bossuet was supremely political, but his character was not that of an intriguer. Intrigue is the policy of weakness. Madame de Maintenon herself fell into that error, but posterity is not to be deceived. At any rate, Bossuet, the dupe of his own virtue, and of the interested motives of a woman who was ambitious but not hypocritical, took the same part in the banishment of Madame de Montespan for the benefit of Madame de Maintenon, which he had already played in the removal of Mademoiselle de la Vallière for the advantage of Madame de Montespan. He spoke, wrote, and acted as an apostle; he did not fear to offend the King by pointing out the inflexible rules of the Church; he caused the sacramental rites to be refused to Madame de Montespan, and obtained a pledge from the King that he would never allow her to return to Versailles.

Digitized by Google

A look, a word, a tender reproach from Madame de Montespan, often triumphed over the minister of religion; love tore the royal promises to atoms. Madame de Montespan regained her empire. Bossuet saw her by the King's order; he endeavoured to move her conscience, but he only succeeded in obtaining outward respect and secret hate. Madame de Montespan sought everywhere for some weak point in the character of the bishop, that she might undervalue his rigid virtue in the King's estimation, but she could find none. His life was irreproachable, his piety had no fault but excess. Bossuet felt humiliated by his failure with the haughty favourite, but he drew consolation from universal respect.

Meanwhile nature, time, satiety, the storms of passion, and, above all, the slow, assiduous, underhand working of Madame de Maintenon, who every hour kept watch over the King's heart and the transient revivals of his affection;—all these combined agencies effected what religion alone was unable to accomplish. Madame de Montespan was finally subdued, and driven away by one who owed everything to her, even the opportunity of achieving the conquest. It seemed outwardly as if her place in the King's heart had been only occupied by religion: but she herself was not deceived,—she felt that she was supplanted by a new favourite. Madame de Montespan died of grief and mortification.

The silent passion of the King for Madamé de Maintenon increased more and more every day. By op-

Digitized by Google

posing it with inflexible virtue, she raised this love to delirium. The widow of Scarron became the wife of Louis XIV. Address and piety united, placed her almost on the throne; her superior intellect retained her there, where she ruled for nearly half a century. Her reign was the sovereignty of the priesthood, through the agency of a woman: the sequel is well known. It was necessary to enter into these details, to render clearly intelligible the part taken by Bossuet in the court intrigues, which brought on and followed the dominion of a favourite chosen by the eyes, but elevated to the rank of a queen through scruples of conscience.

After the education of the Dauphin, whose death did not much distress his father, the King wished to recompense Bossuet for his labour, and perhaps for his unsuccessful endeavours in preparing an heir to the throne. Louis XIV. desired nothing beyond mediocrity in those who came nearest to himself, not even in the persons of his sons. The young prince had asked for the bishopric of Beauvais, which had recently become vacant, for his preceptor; Louis refused it, because this bishopric would confer upon its possessor the title and rank of duke and peer, which his pride could not bear to behold associated with a plebeian name. Genius, in his eyes, might lead men to greatness, but could never render them noble. This want of exalted birth in Bossuet, was the invincible obstacle to his elevation to the most valuable dioceses and highest honours of his profession. His

Digitized by Google

family, though distinguished in the magistracy, had not the *éclat* of the hereditary races of soldiers and courtiers: his was the rank from which the King selected his ministers, but not his peers.

The archbishopric of Paris, to which he had always secretly aspired as the French patriarchal throne, and for which nature seemed to have destined him, was bestowed on M. de Harlay, a prelate of a servile mind and of doubtful life, who had no other title than his name.

To Bossuet was given the inferior bishopric of Meaux, upon which he reflected the rays of his own glory. He had a mind too ambitious not to feel his ill-treatment, and the preference which the court showed for their own class; but at the same time he possessed sufficient grandeur of soul and solidity of faith to trample such weakness underfoot: he therefore devoted himself to his church at Meaux as to a duty assigned by Heaven.

Before taking possession of his episcopal palace, he went to prepare and strengthen himself with his friend the Abbé de Rancé, at the monastery of La Trappe—in that abode of self-denial and humiliation. The examples which he there beheld of voluntary mortification, hardened him to the disappointments of the world. The Abbé de Rancé spoke to him as if from beyond the grave: all worldly thoughts and prospects faded from their view while engaged in these conversations. Bossuet, during the time of that visit, and often afterwards in the same solitude, subjected

Digitized by Google

himself to all the macerations, interruptions of rest, abandonment of the avocations of life, or rather to the endurance of lingering death, which the rigid observances of these cenobites imposed. We cannot doubt the sincerity of the piety which laid aside the habitual indulgences of the court and the splendours of the episcopacy, to cover himself with ashes and hair-cloth.

From this moment, he passed his time between his palace of Meaux, his country-seat at Germigny, and the royal palace at Versailles. He was a pontiff at Meaux, a philosopher at Germigny, and a politician at court.

We arrive now at that period of his life when his characters of philosopher and pontiff began to be more exclusively absorbed in that of politician. We shall not judge of his conduct in the great quarrel which he maintained for the emancipation of the royal power, either in a Gallican or Roman Catholic point of view, but merely as a question of history.

A stranger to these disputes of the Church with herself, we can easily judge with impartiality, as we stand neuter between the two parties. Let us recapitulate in a few words this important struggle, which made Bossuet appear to some as the emancipator of the royal authority from the power of the Pope;—to others, as a tribune of the Church, and almost a schismatical patriarch of the French clergy.

Like all great quarrels, which grow more bitter the longer they last, this commenced with a trifle, and

Digitized by Google

ended by dividing and shaking to the very foundations the basis of the established church in Rome and France. A legal dispute had been raised between Pope Innocent XI. and the King's Government on a question of finance. Gold is invariably mixed up with every human transaction; religions commence by a discussion of opinions, and end by a clash of interests: creeds are compromised in a budget of supply. The point under argument was whether the King had a right, in the interior of his States, to claim for the public treasury the revenues of the bishoprics in his kingdom, or those of the abbeys and benefices, which might fall vacant by death. The Church said, "This is ecclesiastical property belonging to the Church, to which it is granted by legacies or pious bequests; of this the Church alone can dispose, and on no pretext can it be diverted from its sacred destination." The King said, "It forms part of my dominions, the use of which undoubtedly belongs to the Church; but the ground is mine, and I alone have the right to dispose of it when the Church and I do not agree in naming the same incumbent."

This quarrel, already one of long standing, had been adjudicated many centuries before by the Council of Lyons under Pope Gregory X. The germ of discord had been stifled by giving satisfaction to both parties according to the places under discussion and the established custom, by declaring that the Pope should have possession of those provinces which he had been in the habit of enjoying, while the King should retain those

Digitized by Google

in which the Pope had not habitually exercised his right.

This contest, revived during several years by the court of Rome, had obliged Louis XIV. to convoke an extraordinary assembly of the French clergy, in 1682, to settle the dispute even by authority of the bishops themselves. It was a very extreme measure, and an act of fearful temerity in a monarch who was so much attached to the Church, to order the convocation of a national and jealous assembly, armed with authority and language, in the face of the Roman pontificate and the Catholic clergy of the whole universe, to discuss the limits of a temporal and a spiritual power, which had been for so long a time so indistinctly but intimately confounded. The entire Church might then divide itself into great factions, of which some components would remain in the hands of the popes, others in those of the kings. The very faith of the people, attacked by their own pastor, might become weakened in the course of these debates. We can hardly understand, at the present time, how Louis XIV. ventured to draw these questions from the mysterious depths of the diplomacy which had discussed, postponed, or unravelled them secretly in the chanceries of Rome, to revive them in open display, and, as we may say, under the full tide of public excitement, in an assembly where the most minute proceedings are loudly promulgated. Confident in his clergy, whose feelings of independence, whether national or episcopal, identified themselves with his

Digitized by Google

cause, he ventured on this bold measure, and approached as near by this unprecedented audacity to schism, as it is possible to approach with so prudent a court as that of Rome, which could not precipitate him into the gulf he had prepared without injury to itself.

He preceded this convocation by a peremptory announcement which claimed for himself alone the royal right over the livings of France, and the exclusive privilege of nominating all bishops and pastors throughout the entire kingdom. In this proclamation he also exacted an oath of personal fidelity from all his bishops: this oath, unanimously taken, guaranteed him the unanimous votes of the whole assembly. The Pope replied by threats, which, although they did not yet actually take the form of excommunication, caused the report of that thunder of the Vatican to be heard approaching from the distance.

"We shall no longer deal with this affair by letters," exclaimed the Pope; "but we shall not neglect the more convincing arms placed in our hands by that Divine Power with which we are invested. Neither dangers nor tempests can shake us. We do not hold our own life dearer than our salvation, and that of yourself and your flocks."

The bishops replied to these menaces of Rome in a general letter to the King, in which they took his part against the sovereign pontiff in language which still acknowledged faith, while it stepped beyond the bounds of respect. The Pope, being thus defied, excommunicated several dioceses. The clergy assembled in a body

Digitized by Google

at Paris. Bossuet was chosen by the King as the exponent of his thoughts before these representatives of the national Church, and the champion of his rights against the encroachments of Rome. On this occasion the orator, more in the character of a politician than a bishop, opened the sittings by a speech such as an ambassador would deliver in presence of a congress. He began by naming the Gallican Church—a word which, to him alone, signified at least a threat of destruction in the unity hitherto universally acknowledged. He pronounced a eulogium upon this Church, thus nationalized by the appellation, which flattered the pride of its members. Then, having shown the reciprocal dangers of a rupture with Rome, he finished by an invocation to unity, and by a hymn of allegiance to the Church of Rome, which ill agreed with the spirit of contention of which he was at that moment the organ, and with the revolt of the royal power which he had just signified to the sovereign Pontiff.

We are well acquainted with this dithyrambic on Catholic unity:

"Oh, Church of Rome! mother of all Churches and of all believers, Church chosen by God to unite her children in one faith and one charity, we cling to thy unity with every fibre of our hearts! If I forget thee, holy Church of Rome, may I forget myself! May my tongue become dry, and remain immovable in my mouth, if thou art not always my first and holiest consideration, and if I do not ever place thee at the commencement of my songs of rejoicing!"

Digitized by Google

Such was, from the first day of this assembly to the last, the contradictory language of Bossuet,—language which cut with a double edge, like that of a man who wished to imply that he was still an apostle after he had become entirely a politician: it seemed as if he wished to deafen the Catholic world by his declamations upon unity, and as if, at the same time, he sought to stifle by the noise of his hymns on the Romish orthodoxy, the report of those blows which he dealt against Rome and against the sovereign authority of the Pope.

The members of the assembly, without exception, decided upon the King's side. The sovereign pontiff reproached them for their defection in a voice in which complaint was mingled with objurgation. "Which of you," said he to the bishops, "has dared to speak before the King in so holy a cause? Who amongst you has descended into the arena and opposed himself as a wall for Israel? Who has had the courage to do this? Who has even uttered a word that savours of ancient liberty? Why have you not even deigned to speak for the honour and interest of Christ? *We shall annul all that you have done!*"

Bossuet replied tartly, and almost seditiously, in the name of the assembly, in a letter to the bishops of France. Words rose against words, and hearts against hearts, until finally it came to action. Bossuet proposed to draw up a series of propositions, accepted and signed by the members of the assembly, to serve for the future as an immutable code of maxims and in-

Digitized by Google

dependent opinions of a Gallican Church, a Church conformable to that of Rome in faith, but opposed to it in its interior regulations; thus establishing an irrevocable formula of what she wished to believe and what she wished to deny. It has been generally believed that Bossuet was the author of these propositions, but he was only the transcriber. The Government stood behind the bishop, and slipped these maxims into his hand. The politics of the council prompted the orator of the proposed Church. Bossuet was nothing more than the instrument of Colbert.

One day, in one of those conversations of old age, in which confidence escapes from the hearts of men as life ebbs away, "I demanded of Bossuet," says the depositary of his most intimate thoughts, the Abbé Ledieu, "who it was that had suggested to him the plan of the propositions of the clergy with regard to the power of the Church? He told me that M. Colbert, then ministerial secretary of State, was the true author, and that it was he alone who had persuaded the King." M. Colbert, added Bossuet, pretended that it was the right opportunity to remodel the French doctrine as regarded the power and interference of the sovereign pontiff; that in a time of peace and concord it could not be attempted, and that it was necessary to take advantage of open war. The Chancellor Letellier rejected this idea of Colbert, as did the Archbishop of Rheims, son of the Chancellor and a friend of Bossuet; they dreaded the consequences. The King took part with Colbert, and Bossuet coincided with the King.

Digitized by Google

Louis XIV., in his eyes, was invested with the divine and supernatural power of the throne. He drew up the propositions in such diplomatic and circumspect terms that they took from the form all the hidden energy of the text. He preceded the four propositions by a preamble which redoubled his genuflections before the unity of the Romish Church, at the very moment when he was about to strike it with a mortal blow. Then followed the propositions themselves.

The first proclaimed the independence, already universally allowed, of the temporal power of kings and princes, and of the spiritual jurisdiction of the popes.

The second contained only the confirmation of this temporal independence by the Gallican Church.

The third recommended the clergy to respect the limits of this mutual independence.

The fourth, which alone in its spirit infringed upon the spiritual power of the sovereign pontiff, declared that, "although the Pope had the principal voice in matters of faith, his decrees were nevertheless not irrevocable, at least if they were not confirmed by the consent of the Church."

We see that the last line of the last maxim contained in itself the entire revolution, couched in a few words: the authority of the pontifical Government, even in matters of faith, was no longer acknowledged by the Gallican Church, unless this authority was confirmed by the consent of the Church. Now, where was this Church?—was it at Rome?—was it at Paris? It could only exist in the united councils of the Pope:

Digitized by Google

the Pope convoked no councils; the Church then held no visible part in his authority or government.

It was anarchy, under the name of the Gallican Church to-day, the Spanish Church to-morrow, and the Italian or German Church on the day after: unity without doubt existed, but only in theory: differences existed in fact. Faith and discipline floated at the mercy of national exigencies or opinions, until arrested by the purely metaphysical solution of a future council. In two words, unity was the principle, division the consequence. The universal Church lost itself in these different interpretations of government and discipline, with the chance of being again found at the expiration of centuries.

The civil constitution of the French clergy in 1791, which declared the "Assemblée Constituante," to be schismatic, did not go the length of Bossuet in the doctrine of the independence of churches.

The "Assemblée Constituante" confined itself to claiming for the nation that which belonged to the nation,—administration, property, and discipline; in fact, all that related to temporal possessions. Bossuet went so far as to claim independence in matters of faith: the schism was deeper, though it was not expressly fulminated against by Rome.

The circumspection of Louis XIV. in the application of the new code, and the patience of the Pope in the impending punishment, deadened the blows that these two temporal and spiritual powers endeavoured to inflict on each other by the hand of Innocent XI. and

Digitized by Google

that of the Bishop of Meaux. Both were prompt to threaten, but neither desired to come to open rupture. The Church stood in need of Louis to check the advances of Protestantism by the sword of the King of France; Louis wanted the Court of Rome, that it might authorize, in the name of Heaven, the compulsion, war, and proscriptions, that he meditated in his states in order to bring them, by unity of faith, to undivided submission to his royal will. After mutual menaces, they began to negotiate. There were perpetual dissensions, without absolute schism; but though the schism was not openly declared in words, it did not the less exist in thought.

This holy and sublime factionary, Bossuet, who had been proclaimed the father of the Church at Paris, was called at Rome, the father of error and revolt. He is still so considered in the eyes of the true monarchical Catholics of the Vatican. The severer advocates of orthodoxy, Bellarmine and De Maistre, deal heavily with his memory; the "Assemblée Constituante" invokes it; everywhere except in France he is denominated the great agitator of the Church; and whenever a prince desires to negotiate with Rome through violence, or that an assembly of the people wishes to throw off the yoke of its spiritual government, the name of Bossuet is ever found at the bottom of these religious seditions, disturbances, and discussions.

What is there just, and what unjust, in the glorification on the part of some, and in the secret maledictions of others, towards this great man? According

Digitized by Google

to our conviction, all have reason: love and hatred to his memory may both find room in the estimation of true Christians.

He retrenched with a bold hand and a powerful stroke of religious policy, the theocratical pretensions which in the dark ages made the temporal power of the people subordinate to the spiritual domination of the Popes: he rendered unto Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's, and for this he deserves well both of conscience and government. But, speaking in a Christian sense, did he render unto God the things that were God's?—or rather, did he respect as the head, centre, and unity of the spiritual authority of the Church, that dogmatical, indefectible, unceasing, and universal authority which constitutes the foundation of Christian government? No; he inflicted on it, respectfully but fearlessly, the severest blow that this unity has received since the great heresiarchs. He caused the French clergy to sign, at the dictation of the King, a maxim which transferred authority in matters of faith from the head to the members. He federalized the Catholic monarchy; and he substituted in the place of a visible, sovereign, overruling arbiter of the faith at Rome, an ideal, invisible, mute, and expectant Church, to which every national and subordinate Church might appeal if she wished to refuse obedience to the apparent head,—an expectant Church, which could never assemble, speak, or act, without the incipient and concurrent influence of the Pope, against whom it was convoked in idea, without being assembled

Digitized by Google

in fact; and during the absence of which convocation, every separate state could regulate at pleasure its own distinct faith, which Bossuet vainly denominated *one*. It was in fact a summons to a future council, the real Greek kalends of Christianity; and during the interval of this indefinite appeal, faith and government devolved in the name of unity on each national Church. Such, in conclusive analysis, was the work of Bossuet at the assembly of 1682,—a high-priest against kings and people as regarded liberty of conscience, and a grand tribune on their side against the spiritual power of the sovereign pontiffs: such was the double part he played during and after this assembly, proving himself entirely a politician, while he ceased for the time to be an apostle.

Bossuet had rashly raised this never-ending question, Is the Catholic Church a monarchy, or is it a republic? If a republic it is no longer one, but many, and engaged in perpetual deliberation. It forms and reforms its system incessantly, according to the majority of votes. This becomes a government of numbers, and in this case there is no occasion for a head at Rome—the head is everywhere.

If, on the other hand, it is a monarchy, it must have a head, and this head can only be one: it must neither be absent, mute, adjourned, nor carried from place to place, as Bossuet in his last maxim declares.

In either case, Bossuet, as a Christian, a Catholic, and, above all, as a bishop holding his authority from Rome, was standing on the slippery brink of many errors.

Digitized by Google

But the Catholic Church, according to us, is neither a monarchy nor a republic; it is a theocracy, or rather a government derived from God, which means the inspiration of the Holy Spirit bestowed by Him on his Church. To whom does this inspired Spirit speak, according to the Catholic theory? To the General Councils. But where are these Councils? Nowhere, until the supreme pontiff, the executive vicar of the Divine Legislator, convokes them. To whom then did Bossuet propose to assign the interpretation of faith and the government of the Church? To future times,—to the councils which were expected to assemble, and in the interval to anarchy. Every ambitious, daring, and eloquent bishop, upheld by the prince or by the people, might render himself in his own nation, during this interregnum of the councils, more a pope than the Pope, and more a Church than the Church. It was the institution of a patriarch in every Christian state. The patriarch of France was already designated in the person of Bossuet, by genius, piety, and the favour of the sovereign.

Bossuet, in fact, came forth from this assembly not with the title, but with the position and authority, of a patriarch of the Gallican Church: it owed its name to him and decreed to him the supremacy. The grateful King sanctioned by his deference the magisterial ascendancy over opinions and consciences which Bossuet had assumed. The Bishop of Meaux became the oracle of all ecclesiastical matters. The custody and care of consciences,—the most important of all ministries,—at

Digitized by Google

the close of a religious war and on the eve of religious proscriptions, then devolved, by universal admission, upon Bossuet.

We shall now see him play a very different part to that which he had just taken against the Church of Rome. The upholder of independence in Kings, was about to declare himself opposed to independence of conscience in the people: this comprises the dark stain on his life. For the honour of humanity and Christian piety, we wish we could bury it in oblivion; but history is the judge of eminent men, and to that tribunal they must bow, however holy they may be;—the conscience of the human race is holier still. Bossuet began by resuming his humble profession of catechist, preacher, and commentator upon sacred subjects. He wrote "A Treatise on the Communion," and "Aspirations on the Mysteries." In these tracts, his mind embraced the different points of faith, interpreted and coloured them according to the bias of his own powerful imagination. The poet is again revealed under the guise of the theologian. We perceive Pindar standing upon the Christian Calvary.

"Let us not blush for our opinions;"—thus he expresses himself to more timid preachers, who began by passing over in silence the mysteries of faith, that they might confine themselves to immutable morality:—"silence upon points of faith would be positive cowardice."

He summoned Fénelon, his young and dear disciple, to preach in his church at Meaux, and in the country

Digitized by Google

districts of his diocese. Fénelon was at that period the child after his own heart. Bossuet, in the eyes of this gentle and pious spirit, possessed all the charms and authority of a father. This Homeric and Platonic attachment, softened by Christian love, carried the Bishop of Meaux back to those recreations of profane and sacred antiquity, in which he indulged when his time was not occupied in the sanctuary. He took Fénelon with him to Germigny, his country residence and haven of repose, where he rested from theological controversy, and sought relaxation in the society of a few select disciples. Friendship held over this firm mind a powerful and softening influence. Already arrived at the summit of life, he looked beneath him with benevolence, and held out his hand to younger men who mounted after him. He resumed at the same time his conferences with the Protestant ministers, but these meetings only bore the semblance of discussion. Bossuet submitted impatiently to that liberty of speech towards the religion of the King, which he had himself indulged in as regarded the Pope, and he constantly interposed the royal authority in the cause of God. "Sir," said he, rising in indignation from his seat, to a minister who argued against him with too much freedom, "if you continue this tone, I shall compel you to leave the pulpit and the assembly. Learn to speak with proper respect of the religion your sovereign professes." He insulted the new converts in his diocese by recalling to their minds, without himself remembering the apostles of the Saviour, the humble

Digitized by Google

condition of their ministers. "Do you recollect," said he to them, "Pierre Leclerc, the wool-carder, a man who dared, all on a sudden, to leave his shop and preside in the temple? Behold the founder of your pretended reformed Church of Meaux!"

His friend and panegyrist, the Abbé Ledieu, confesses that the severity of his expressions towards Protestants alienated them more and more from his faith. He was too much convinced of the truth of his own belief, not to be imperious; he required obedience, or he exercised the power of proscription; he was only gentle towards those whom he considered the true believers; his meditations and his letters to his nuns are worthy of a pastor of souls; his polemics are those of a dictator of dogmas. We omit the greater part of these disputes, now fallen into oblivion, and confine ourselves to those which form an era in his life. To understand perfectly his sacerdotal gravity, and to disentangle it from politics, two different components always associated in the life of this priest, who was both oracle and minister, we must here dilate a little on the closing mysteries of this reign. These mysteries all verged towards and terminated in the chamber of a woman of fifty years of age, the governess of the illegitimate children of a king older even in heart than in years:— this female was Madame de Maintenon, who lived in secrecy under the roof of the palace of Versailles.

Madame de Maintenon, assisted by Bossuet, had succeeded in removing her benefactress, Madame de Montespan.

Digitized by Google

The principal charm of Madame de Maintenon—mature beauty, preserved by the retirement and chaste regularity of her life from the wasting evaporations of the world, which soon cause incautious indulgence to fade, — had given additional weight to the King's scruples. In attaching himself to Madame de Maintenon, he thought he was reconciling himself to virtue: the charms of confidential and pious communication, the intercourse with a mind as delicate as just, the pride of raising to his own rank a being whom he truly loved; and finally, as must be admitted to the King's honour, the secure reliance which he placed on the advice of this superior woman, the idea of possessing in her a prime minister who would never overshadow his glory, and whose fortune, identified solely with himself, would assure him a fidelity almost conjugal; all these endowments and attractions—all this solicitude for the public good—all this jealousy of the ruling ministers, who unceasingly reminded him of Richelieu and Mazarin —all this combined pride and tenderness, had increased to an absolute dominion the feminine and, at the same time, manly empire of Madame de Maintenon. To step from this controlling influence to the royal couch, required but a moment of weakness in the virtue of the woman; to enable her to mount the throne, there needed only a single forgetfulness of dignity on the part of the King. The woman was inflexible, and the monarch yielded.

Bossuet, cherishing the ambition of giving an Esther to the Church, flattered by the respect which the

Digitized by Google

favourite lavished on him, and secretly consulted by the King as to a private marriage, which would at the same time secure his safety and his honour, advised the step which Louis suggested.

The Archbishop of Paris, De Harlay, a bishop without scruples, but not destitute of regard for the dignity of the throne, consented to the marriage, on condition that it should never be made public. Louvois, son of the Chancellor, who had for some years past exercised the office of Minister of War with almost absolute power, and who for this reason had become necessary to the King's glory, endeavoured to make his master blush at the intended abasement of his rank. The minister could obtain nothing from the enslaved sovereign, but an oath that he would never raise to the throne the woman he was about to elevate to his bed.

The marriage was celebrated at night by the Archbishop of Paris, in the presence of Bossuet, Luvois, and several intimate friends, as witnesses; some of whom were well satisfied, and others deeply humiliated, at this miraculous example of love.

Every evidence implies that Bossuet, who saw in all that occurred a means of advancing the interests of religion, did not here check the ambition or hopes of Madame de Maintenon, and that the steps of the altar at which this union was consecrated, appeared to him as the steps of the throne which the wife of the modern Ahasuerus would speedily ascend. However this may be, Madame de Maintenon returned from the ceremony, if not a queen in name, at least an absolute ruler in

Digitized by Google

effect. The King gave publicity enough to his marriage to prevent scandal, and surrounded it with sufficient mystery to preserve the honour of the throne. A suite of royal apartments, on the same floor with those of Louis, at Versailles, received the unacknowledged wife. The royal family and courtiers attended there to offer respectful homage to the woman, whom the caprice of the King had almost crowned; and the King held his councils of state in her chamber. The furniture alone bore evidence of the actual elevation of the favourite to the rank of queen, in the heart of the sovereign and the privacy of his palace. This room contained only two armchairs, of the same fashion, placed on each side of the fireplace — one for Louis XIV., the other for Madame de Maintenon; a table and two low stools occupied the centre of the apartment; upon one of these stools the minister, who came to transact business with the King, seated himself; on the other Madame de Maintenon laid her book or her needlework. She was present, mute and apparently inattentive, at all these conferences, usually preserving a modest and deferential silence before the mystery of government, but being often urged by the King to give her opinion, she delivered it with the clear sense, sound reason, and propriety of language, which characterized her thoughts and elocution.

The natural instinct of the court, the readiest and most servile of all instincts under an imperious master, soon felt that neglect or favour, elevation or disgrace, empire or fall, depended upon her voice. Madame de

Digitized by Google

Maintenon held a court in fact; but happier than an acknowledged queen, who must receive that court according to established etiquette, she enjoyed the rare privilege of choosing her own: she confined it to a learned, pious, and intimate society, amongst whom were included all that were most illustrious or most respected in France, from Racine and Nicole, to Fénelon and Bossuet.

Fénelon, younger, more beloved, and a more constant attendant at court than Bossuet, from the office he held, as preceptor to the Duke of Burgundy, the King's grandson, was not long before he won to himself, as he conquered everything, the mind, piety, and admiration of Madame de Maintenon.

The imagination of this poet, deeply coloured with religious tints,—his inborn nobility of manners and mind,—his refinement, at the same time clear, delicate, and sustained with dignity,—his eloquence, flowing and persuasive without effort,—his natural elegance, revealed externally in the graceful regularity of his features,—and finally, his piety, which was gentle rather than dogmatic, and resembled a transfiguration of evangelical sweetness into a disciple of the Greek Plato—all these combined attributes completely fascinated Madame de Maintenon; she soon began to prefer him to Bossuet, for whom she felt more fear than attachment: but she could never make the King participate in this predilection for Fénelon. Something warned the confused but certain intelligence of this prince, that so many graces might hide some snares,

Digitized by Google

that this vivid imagination might feed itself on chimeras, and that boldness in religion, or fanciful schemes of politics, might be conceived and brought to light in the mind of this philospher, who appeared to believe in, and to be ambitious of attaining perfectibility. Nevertheless the attraction felt by Madame de Maintenon for Fénelon was so powerful, that it even prevailed over her apprehension of offending the King by this preference. She hid her admiration in her secret heart, and admitted Fénelon into the select and limited circle of pious men and mystified women who discoursed in her apartments at Versailles, or St. Cyr, on the platonic refinements of transcendental devotion. She listened to him with delight during these edifying conversations. Her mind, naturally clear and solid, but long severed from the association of human tenderness, gratified itself in suffering her ever-youthful imagination to indulge in the ecstasies of divine love.

A woman of enigmatical pretensions, still young and beautiful, devout and eloquent, and surrounded with an indescribable cloud of supernatural mystery, had obtained introduction into Madame de Maintenon's circle at St. Cyr, as a subject of edification. This woman was named Madame Guyon. We cannot understand how Madame de Maintenon so lightly admitted amongst the young neophytes of her oratory, in the royal monastery of St. Cyr, such an equivocal personage as Madame Guyon, whose character floated between the adventuress and the inspired devotee. Devotion has its infatuations and irregularities, like every other passion.

Digitized by Google

Madame Guyon, the widow of a rich citizen of Paris, and endowed with an ardent imagination, had, after the death of her husband, although still young, rushed precipitately into the exercise of excessive piety. She followed from town to town, and even to Turin and Lausanne, the director of her conscience, a visionary monk, who appeared to exercise over her a supernatural influence. She founded in several places female convents, of which she appointed her confessor the head. Expelled by more than one bishop, on account of this mysterious connexion, Madame Guyon returned to Paris, to propagate, by concealed preaching, theories of the pure love of God, and strange inspirations, in which the miracle of the visions authorized the peril of the doctrines. She had published under the title of "Torrents," the effusions of a sensual piety, in which the thoughts were pure, but the expressions were scandalous. Her beauty, adventures, mystery, and inspirations, her eloquence which lost and dissolved itself in ecstasies and tears; and the persecutions she had suffered for the cause of God, occasioned her to be sought after by all those who were curious in the search of perfection. She possessed the charm that pity infuses into generous minds; thus she obtained impassioned friends and bitter enemies.

Fénelon became acquainted with her at the house of Madame de Maintenon. He believed that he had at last discovered one of those sybils invested by antiquity with the gift of inspiration on the tripod, and that Calvary might inspire more divinely than Dodona.

Digitized by Google

Above all, he was seduced by the sublime doctrine of the disinterested love of God, which only borrows its light from the passionate contemplation of supreme beauty, and demands from adoration no other recompense than adoration in return; but he appeared to glide with Madame Guyon, his oracle, into one of the many consequences dangerous to the morality of this principle. These were his expressions :—"Once arrived at this state of perfect and disinterested love, the soul, completely raised by God above the infirmities of being, becomes exempt from sin, and can no longer be sullied by the actions committed under the influence of the senses, during its absence in the vile sphere of matter and unrighteousness."

"The world," said Bossuet, in speaking of this woman and her doctrines, "appears as if it desired to be delivered of some strange novelty!" This novelty was brooded over for a long time by Madame de Maintenon, Madame Guyon, Fénelon, and the pious female *coterie* of St. Cyr and Versailles, without bursting into birth. The education of the Duke of Burgundy was drawing to a close, and Fénelon, through Madame de Maintenon, had been appointed Archbishop of Cambray before the new doctrine broke upon the world.

Bossuet, up to this period, had been silent, in spite of the strange rumours which from time to time reached his ears: he loved his pupil Fénelon too much, and had too firm a belief in his virtue, to suspect him of any aberration of heart or mind, in the track of a visionary and suspected woman. He was grieved, but

Digitized by Google

he did not yet thunder forth in indignation. Madame de Maintenon also enjoined him to silence and reserve. The Bishop of Meaux feared that his lightnings might rebound from the head of this Priscilla upon that of her powerful protectress; his conduct, during these unsettled years, was full of prudence towards the Church, of circumspection towards Madame de Maintenon, and of enduring patience towards Fénelon. Controversy alone excited the zeal of Bossuet to religious anger, and holy rage was the only impulse that could drive him to injury and persecution.

The publication of the book of "Maxims of Saints," by Fénelon, changed a polemical discussion, which until then had been domestic, into a theological dispute: this book was a skilful temerity on the part of the author.

Faithful to his friendship for Madame Guyon and enchained by her errors, Fénelon wished to avow this attachment in misfortune, and endeavoured to prove, by quotations from the fathers of the Church, that the denounced doctrine of this woman was in fact the venerated doctrine of the saints.

The book was dangerous to faith, and more dangerous still to morality. The shadow even of a schism was repulsive to the King; his idea of religion consisted in obedience; he feared everything that deviated from the letter of prescriptive ordinances; his dry, barren, and cold imagination never ascended to contemplation; he reproached Madame de Maintenon for her tenderness of heart towards Fénelon, and her mystical regard

Digitized by Google

for a woman who disturbed consciences and unsettled faith. Madame de Maintenon did not suffer either of her personal friendships to weigh against the pleasure of the King. She abandoned Madame Guyon to her persecutors and Fénelon to his antagonist. Bossuet now, openly acknowledged by her, broke silence with regret, but with determined energy; war began between the defender of established doctrine and the young innovator.

The contest was long, bitter, and inveterate; and ended by the irremediable disgrace of Fénelon at court, and by his signal condemnation at Rome. Theologians and courtiers ranged themselves on the side of Bossuet; —men of sensibility, independence, and imagination, on that of Fénelon. This breaking up of an old friendship between two pontiffs, one of whom had been the spiritual father of the other,—the denunciations of the Pope, the anathemas of Rome, the insinuations against the orthodoxy and almost against the life of the young archbishop,—the diplomatic intrigues, supporting at Rome the priestly intrigues of the Abbé Bossuet an unworthy nephew of a great man, and the medium of conveying his uncle's anger to the Pope, thus promoting religion by calumny; and finally, the implacable triumph of Bossuet himself, who scarcely treated his victim with common delicacy or respect;—all these considerations have cast a just and indelible stain on the character of Bossuet in the eyes of posterity. But let us speak the truth, even though against our inclination: posterity has hitherto been governed by undue

Digitized by Google

partiality, a tendency which it was unable to resist towards such a gentle and attractive spirit as Fénelon, Posterity has its favourites, as well as princes. No one merited this predilection of heart in opposition to judgment, more than Fénelon; but in the present day, when the ashes of his pamphlets are cold, and when time has given to the winds the heavy or light leaves of his polemical lucubrations, there is no reason why the truth should not be openly declared; and after having placed ourselves on the side of leniency in excusing the errors of Fénelon, let us assume the tone of severity in our estimate of Bossuet, that we may pronounce an equitable judgment between these two eminent personages.

Here, then, we see the two greatest ornaments of the Church, of politics and government, of the episcopacy and of the sacred pulpit, united up to this period by the most paternal attachment on the part of Bossuet, and by the most filial respect on that of Fénelon; the one already old, the other still young; the one gliding down, and the other mounting up the ascent of life, honour, and professional distinction; the one, arrived at the apex of existence, crowned with white hair, strong in the authority of his elder birthright in the episcopacy and his *antiquity* in the faith, as he himself designates his august pretensions, stretching forth his hand to the other, to raise him as a successor to that species of grand pontificate which he himself had long exercised in the Church of France. Bossuet prepared, like Elijah, while ascending to

Digitized by Google

heaven, to let his mantle fall upon this second Elisha. He personally consecrated him Archbishop of Cambray, with prophetic words, which marked him out to the world as his natural inheritor in the supreme magistracy of faith, doctrine, and example. He delighted to exhibit publicly, in the person of this young and eloquent disciple, the torch without a shadow, by the light of which the faithful should walk in a sure and straight path after God had been pleased to remove his tutor from his earthly labours. But this was little. The aged churchman was equally a politician and a pontiff. He had much to redeem, by his zeal, in the opinion of that court of Rome, from which he had wrested so much by violent opposition. He owed to it the superintending control of men's minds, and the extirpation of rising heresies; he owed to the King, of whom he was the eye and mouth in ecclesiastical matters, the calming down of religious troubles, hardly suppressed, and ready to break out again throughout the kingdom; he owed to the heir presumptive of the throne, the Duke of Burgundy, who was confided to teachers chosen by him, not to permit any exaggeration, corruption, or alteration in his faith (destined to represent that of a great empire,) by infatuations, insanities, or hallucinations, for which he was responsible to the kingdom; and finally, he owed to God, whose minister he was by the episcopacy and by inspiration, not to betray, through feebleness of heart, or a cowardly complaisance of friendship, what he considered in the light of divine truth—a

Digitized by Google

trust confided by apostolic succession to the last of the Apostles, represented by himself.

Suddenly, this father of the Church, this instructor of doctrine, this guardian of the faith, this chief of the episcopacy, this minister of the King, this exterminator of heresy, this viceroy of Rome, this religious tutor of the soul of the heir to the throne, this sentinel of the kingdom's peace, this custodian of the purity of the national religion,—awoke up at the report of the strange rumours spread around him.

He heard that his disciple, his son, his predestined successor, the preceptor of the heir of the throne, the Archbishop of a great diocese,—Fénelon, in fact,—had given himself up to political dreams and ecstatic visions, more approaching empty chimeras than rational sanctity. He ascertained that, in a book still unpublished, but which had already transpired in the court and in the city, "Telemachus," Fénelon had written, under the shadow of the palace of Louis XIV., for the instruction of his grandson, a most deadly satire upon the reign, and had drawn a most odious portrait, of the grandfather of his pupil.

He learnt that this book, instead of giving to the inheritor of the throne sound lessons in practical government, pointed out to him, in clouds and false colouring, a course of politics, which exhibited no knowledge of mankind as they are,—without reality, body, or muscles; which called all necessary authority, tyranny; which shook the faith of kings in themselves; which condemned all the traditions hitherto handed

Digitized by Google

down by experience, and replaced them with his Utopia of Salentum; with puerilities or empty high-sounding absurdities, which extol equality instead of hierarchy, and the multiplicity instead of the unity of power; which praises labour and proscribes luxury;—to sum up all, a book, or rather a dream, in which the phantasies destroy each other, and the publication of which, according to Bossuet, could have no other effect than that of enfeebling the mind of the future King, and of misleading the people by incoherent illusions.

Satisfied at the first glance he bestowed upon the pages of this Utopia, the mind of Bossuet, so imbued with the spirit of government, was more saddened than irritated; and when "Telemachus" was brought to him, accompanied by an account of the great sensation that his pupil's book had produced in the world, "No," said he, "I shall not read it: at my age, I have no longer time for fables!"

From that day, Bossuet did not even speak of Fénelon, from the fear of having too much to say: he only lamented privately that love adventures and voluptuous images, should be described with evident self-enjoyment by the pen of a Christian archbishop, and placed before the delicate imagination of a young man who was soon to become a king.

But other reports, more alarming, and still more incredible, reached the ears of Bossuet. He learnt that his disciple, fascinated by the ecstasies, and convinced by the visions of a young enthusiast, had aban-

Digitized by Google

doned the august and holy established authorities of the faith, to seek doctrine and salvation in the revelations of a female adventurer, whose mind and judgment were the sport of every change of feeling; and whose moral conduct even, although perhaps chaste, was not exempt from suspicion. He imposed on himself the task of perusing the shameful effusions of piety of this St. Theresa of the drawing-rooms. He felt as under the influence of a dream, when he read the "Torrents;" an undeniable impulse of delirium, written upon the tripod of the sybils. He listened to a repetition of those strange scenes of pretended possession by the Divine Spirit,—scenes in which, even in the presence of Fénelon, Madame Guyon gave herself up to heavenly guidance, and which caused Bossuet to exclaim, while he blushed for the episcopacy:—

"And Thou, O Lord! if I durst, I would ask Thee to send one of thy seraphim, with the hottest of all thy coals, to purify my lips from this recital, however necessary it has been!"

It was at these mysterious meetings, sometimes authorized by the presence of Fénelon, that Madame Guyon assumed the name of the spouse of Christ,—announced her superiority in the heart of her heavenly husband, even over the Virgin herself, and declared, "that in the state of perfect purification to which she was raised by this union, she should refuse to pray, considering that it was for servants to pray, but that the wife should confine herself to asking favours."

Digitized by Google

Bossuet, in his charitable incredulity of such an excess of mysticism in his disciple, was for a long time silent. At length he interrogated Fénelon with mild anxiety, upon the fact of his mental participation in such extravagances of intellect, propriety, and doctrine.

Fénelon vowed to him that he went no further than to admire the piety of Madame Guyon, and to endeavour to ascertain if her inspirations were real; but that he held his judgment in suspense, his faith protected; and that he was ready to ratify with closed eyes every sentence that Bossuet himself should pronounce against these suspicious innovations.

This solemn promise, unceasingly renewed in writing and in conversation, reassured Bossuet, and induced him patiently to reserve his impending explosion.

At the request of the Archbishop of Paris, M. de Noailles, a commission of the most venerable theologians and bishops of the Church of France was appointed to examine into this delicate affair.

Bossuet desired that Fénelon himself should be invited to attend, from personal respect and a due regard to impartial judgment.

Fénelon declined being present, but he promised to sign the decree of his colleagues in the episcopacy.

The examination was long, and interrupted by circumstances foreign to the matter in question. Madame Guyon, during these delays, sought to propitiate Bossuet himself by an apparent deference to his authority. She came to reside at Meaux, in a convent under his

Digitized by Google

direction. She submitted to his examination; she confessed her rashness; she promised him to be governed in all respects by the decision of the bishops, and to await their sentence at Meaux under his supervision.

Suddenly, Bossuet ascertained that his wily penitent had deceived him; that she had secretly departed from Meaux, and that, concealed in Paris, undoubtedly by the supposed connivance of Fénelon, she there continued her inspired assemblies and preachings. The rage of Bossuet did not yet burst forth, but it began to murmur.

The decree of the bishops was at length pronounced. Fénelon, who had promised to ratify it, refused to affix his signature: he did more; he wrote in favour of Madame Guyon, who had been condemned by his colleagues. He published his book, called "The Maxims of Saints," followed by reiterated letters against Bossuet—letters full of insubordination and complaint under the appearance of deferential submission. Opinion resolved itself into distinct parties; religious factions were formed, which divided the court and the empire.

Bossuet, who had long maintained silence, from grief and regard for the episcopacy, felt himself obliged to reply on behalf of the menaced Church and himself. He answered in a single letter the four accusatory epistles of Fénelon, and reasoned with the doubts of public opinion in a treatise entitled "A Relation of Quietism." He refuted, but still with circumspection and respect, the arguments set forth.

Digitized by Google

by his old pupil; he remembered his former friendship for Fénelon, the possible return to truth of the wanderer, the episcopal character, the favour of Madame de Maintenon, and finally, the virtue of which he had no suspicion, although he denounced error. It was only at insulated moments, and when driven by the excess of injustice, that he suffered the cry of his ulcerated heart to escape,—a cry which was not without a last accent of hope, and an echo of gentleness and tenderness towards his former friend and pupil.

"I have read, Monseigneur," said he at the commencement of his reply, "the four letters that you have addressed to me; and I have, in common with all the world, admired the facility of your genius, the delicacy of your style of reasoning, the vivacity and gentle persuasiveness of your eloquence." He was grieved, and felt himself called upon to justify the necessity of speaking.

"If the author of these innovations," said he, "already condemned by the Church before we can pronounce our opinion, conceals, disguises, and mitigates them, and by so doing only renders them more current, more insinuating, and more dangerous,—should they be suffered, for the welfare of humanity, to glide under the grass and escape the holy severity of theological censure? If I have exceeded this, let it be manifested to me; if I have done no more, God will be my protector against the weakness and vain complaisance of the world."

Digitized by Google

Bossuet ended by resenting, perhaps too keenly, human injury under the appearance of vindicating faith; and he himself, in return, hurled the powers of oratorical insult against his adversary, formerly his son.

"After this, Monseigneur," continued he, "I have nothing more to say, and in reply to your four letters, I shall confine myself to this single answer. If there can be found in all you have written any important point which I have not here refuted, I shall reply to it by other means. [He alluded to the pontifical authority of Rome.] As to letters, you may write as many as you please; you may divide the opinions of the court and city; you may cause your wit and eloquence to be admired, and recall the graces of the 'Provincial Letters' (recent publications of Pascal, which had charmed the laity and highly displeased the Church); —I no longer desire to take part in the spectacle that you seem determined to exhibit to the world." "A new prophetess," exclaimed he elsewhere, "has undertaken in our day to resuscitate heresy: this is the child she wishes to bring forth; the work of this woman is not yet completed. The Archbishop of Cambray, a man of such an elevated position, has suffered himself to be enticed into this unhappy mystery: he will not say that he is ignorant of this ridiculous communication of heavenly grace to an insane female, nor of her prophecies, nor of her pretended state of apostolical sinlessness. According to his own confession, he has allowed her to retain the esteem of many

Digitized by Google

illustrious persons who were guided by his judgment; he has thus suffered an impostor to be respected, who has only uttered as prophecy the illusions of her own heart. I have never spoken until after charity and gentleness had made their last effort. As to what relates to M. de Cambray, I am only too much justified by facts, and by the letters he has written. To what do they attribute this jealousy of which I and my colleagues are accused? And if it is necessary to justify ourselves from so base a passion, what is there to cause jealousy in the new work of this Archbishop? Should we envy him the glory of painting in glowing colours a woman like Madame Guyon? If God has willed that the Church should possess in the person of one of her bishops this living victim of seduction, and if this Priscilla has found her Montanus to defend her, may he overrule—for there is still time—the judgments of the Church! As for the King, who from respect leaves to the Church full liberty of investigation in points of faith, what is there to be astonished at, if he supports by his authority those ecclesiastics who walk in the right path?"

We observe that Bossuet in every instance appeals to force too quickly after an appeal to reason: such is ever the vice of predominant convictions and despotic characters.

In this polemical discussion upon Madame Guyon, with the exception of some severe words which escaped in the ardour of his faith and the desire to vindicate his own character, words too much provoked by the

Digitized by Google

more indirect, but more wounding apostrophes of Fénelon, Bossuet had hitherto conducted himself as a man of calm sense and patience, who desired only to discharge a painful duty. Fénelon, on the other hand, appears throughout, as one under the influence of an illusion, without experience, and imbued with a desire to promote discord: he dreams like a visionary, distresses his instructor, elevates a few female enthusiasts into a sect, avoids judgment of the disputes, retracts, and finally, abuses the patience and silence of the oracle of the Church—to drag him, against his own inclination, into the lists, and to publish, under the semblance of self-justification, charges against Bossuet that were equally unjust and untrue.

Bossuet thinks as an apostle and a politician. He is patient as a friend, and compassionate as a man older than his antagonist; he makes superhuman efforts to soften the reports and confine the scandal to the walls of the sanctuary; and he does not publicly declare his feelings—and even then with tears—until his silence might have been construed into a dereliction of his episcopal duties, a treason against his ministerial office, and a dishonourable submission to the insult offered to his character.

Up to this point, superiority in reason, circumspection, respect, tolerance, and in the mode of carrying on the quarrel, must unquestionably be accorded to Bossuet. A perusal of the reciprocal replies of the two disputants elevates his position, while it materially lowers that of his rival.

Digitized by Google

These distinguished antagonists no longer appeared on the same level. Something of feminine inconsistency showed itself in the attitude and accent of Fénelon, while Bossuet maintained the deportment of a man, and an honest one. We can collect this from the following fragments of his last reply to Fénelon; his repressed indignation doubles the force of his words, and his reserve is more powerful than speech.

"Monseigneur,

"I have perused four letters which you have addressed to me, and, in common with the rest of the world, I admire the fertility of your genius, the delicacy of your style, the vivacity and gentle insinuations of your eloquence. With what a variety of beautiful expressions do you maintain that people represent you as dreaming with your eyes open, and that it is neither reasonable nor just, to accuse you of such gross contradictions, without having legally proved, in a competent court, that you have lost the use of your reason!

"You urge your complaint so far as to say, 'If I am capable of such folly, of which an example could not be found, even amongst madmen who are under restraint and confinement, I am not in a condition to which blame can be attached, and it is you who are in fault, for having written in so serious and energetic a manner against a lunatic.' What elegance is there in these expressions, what beauty in these images! But after all, we feel that arguments of this nature, in a matter-of-fact view, in which the question is to dis-

Digitized by Google

cover whether you have contradicted yourself or not, can only dazzle for a moment, and that we must finally return to truth. . . . .

"It would have been much more satisfactory if you had entered into a precise explanation, and exercised your abilities in the employment of words which convey a consistent meaning, rather than in distorting them at this late period, to escape by any means from the dilemma in which you have plunged yourself.

"But, however, these contradictions are inseparable ingredients of the disease called error; as also of that denominated false and fruitless subtlety; prejudice receives one representation, but truth presents another. Artful and refined arguments are brought forward, incapable of influencing impartial judgment, which naturally rejects them. Whoever is attacked by these maladies, whatever else he may do, can never fail to contradict himself, for he who is in error must necessarily arrive at a certain point, from which he is inevitably plunged into this inconsistent course of reasoning and action. When St. Paul told the pretended doctors that they did not understand either what they spoke of, or affirmed so positively; when he said that erroneous doctrine was full of contradictions, which is one definition of the words in which he proves the incongruities of falsely-named science; when he declared that the heretic (without intending to give this name to him who submits, but applies it solely to him who suffers his faith to be deceived) is condemned by his own judgment; and finally, that all

Digitized by Google

those who oppose themselves to the truth, after having for some time, by an unhappy perseverance, erred, and caused others to err,—that is to say, after having dazzled the world by specious reasoning and seductive eloquence, should cease to advance further, because their folly would then become manifest to all,—the Apostle did not wish to coerce them in bonds, or prove by law that they had lost their reason; he only desired to point out to us that there is a light of truth, which makes itself felt even in error. . . . .

"But this reputation of high intellectual endowments, far from excusing those great minds who rush into error, and drag others with them, is, on the contrary, the direct ground and source of their condemnation. 'Exalted minds,' says St. Augustine, 'subtle geniuses, *magna et acuta ingenia*,—have fallen into the greatest mistakes; because, trusting in their own powers, they have walked with superior boldness: *In tanto majores errores ierunt, quanto præfidentius tanquam suis viribus cucurrerent.* They must neither be confined nor shut up, as you propose. Such remedies are only suggested by a false light: generally speaking, we need only allow them to write freely and display the brilliancy of their wit, in order to see them soon lose and bewilder themselves in their own intricacies, or become entangled in the meshes of their mistaken dialectics.

"I say it with grief, as Heaven can witness, you have endeavoured to refine upon true piety: you have found nothing worthy of you but God, beautiful and

Digitized by Google

perfect in himself. The goodness by which he descends to us, and causes us to ascend again to him, has appeared to you a mode of proceeding unsuitable to the perfect; and you have denounced even hope, since, under the name of pure love, you have established despair as the most complete of all sacrifices: at any rate, it is of this error that you are accused. Whoever wishes to maintain this, cannot do it himself, for he must run against himself in a hundred places, either in endeavouring to find defence, or to cover and conceal his weakness; and yet you have just said, 'Prove that I am a madman;' and sometimes you say, 'Prove that I am insincere,—otherwise my reputation places me beyond suspicion.' No, Monseigneur, truth will not permit this: you may be in heart whatever you please to assert, but we can only judge by your words," &c. &c.

The severity of the Bishop of Meaux, in the sequel of this affair, only showed that he carried right to an extreme point; he pushed justice to the extent of vengeance. But it must be admitted, in his defence, that this error was less his fault than that of his advanced age. Led away, overruled, and governed by his nephew, the Abbé Bossuet,—a man of limited intellect, vulgar soul, spiteful disposition, and a character degraded by servility,—the great bishop appeared drawn down by this relative, to the level of the inquisitors of faith and the persecutors of genius. It was this same nephew who besought Rome to hurl the thunders of the Church

Digitized by Google

upon the head of the Archbishop of Cambray, with as much ardour as a saint could display in praying for heaven. It was he who spread abroad the calumnies against the disciple of his uncle,—who pressed the ministers and the King's ambassadors to extort a condemnation and branding from the Pope, which struck at all innocence of manners, purity of morals, the episcopacy itself, talent, friendship, and virtue,—and who wrote to several of his correspondents at Paris, in speaking of Fénelon, "At length we have chained this ferocious beast!" A true type of those mistaken zealots of the faith, who strive to add to the thunders of heaven, insult and defamation, the miserable substitutes supplied by human anger. But the character of a great man ought not to suffer for the degeneracy of a relation who disgraced his name. In this instance there is congeniality of blood only, but none of mind, genius, or disposition.

We should truly rejoice if the character of Bossuet was stained by no blemish more indelible than the unmerited one which has been cast upon it from partiality to Fénelon in the affair of "Telemachus," and of the treatise on *Quietism*. But there is unfortunately another, which indulgence cannot remove, neither can time efface. He became the oppressor of consciences; he wished to establish by the sword, in the souls of men, that dogmatic principle which governed his own mind —the uniformity of faith which prevailed throughout the kingdom. He was not contented to be the high-priest of the religion of his God,—he desired also to

Digitized by Google

be, and by his practice became, the high-priest of the religion of his King.

We have seen him, in his arguments with the Reformed ministers, profess the impious principle that the religion of the subject must of necessity conform to that of the prince,—a principle which places God subordinate to man, and enables tyranny to extend its influence even over the inaccessible dominions of conscience. It must, however, be admitted that this opinion, delivered and entertained by Bossuet, was not with him the adulation of a monarch; it was the deification of a dogma: dogma, in his theological mind, became deity itself. His whole philosophy was embodied in his catechism.

Liberty of thought had never penetrated his soul, and, as a natural consequence, toleration had no entrance there. He was so convinced of the evident reality of his principles, that he did not admit a doubt of this evidence striking the convictions of other men as powerfully as it had impressed his own. He attributed, in perfect conviction, to obstinacy, revolt, and impiety, all resistance to the authority of the Church: a doubter with him was not merely a free-thinker, he was a positive rebel.

Devoted to theocracy from the bottom of his heart, he believed firmly that the duty of kings was to cause his God, and their God, to reign upon earth by the same laws and the same exercise of power which is given to them to maintain the laws of the kingdom. He had drawn this implacable theory from the Old

Digitized by Google

Testament: conversion or extermination was his traditional motto. Forgetting entirely his invectives against the persecutors of the oppressed Gospel, he admitted that, once triumphant, the Gospel should, in its turn, persecute. Martyrs for any other faith than his own, were not martyrs in his estimation; they were merely factious and vanquished opponents.

We analyse this pious injustice of Bossuet, not to excite admiration, but to demand censure. It takes from the human mind, however exalted it may be, its first instinct—justice; it deprives Christianity of its leading virtue—charity; and religion of its highest dignity—independence. It is the bondage most degrading both to master and slave, transferred from the body to the soul; it is the man, delivered up bound to God and the church, instead of the unfettered spirit, raising his soul with freedom to heaven, and walking by himself to his deity and his altar.

Such was the doctrine of Louis XIV., whose mind, when fathomed to the bottom, was as docile as it was imperious. Louis was great, exclusively by his own will; beyond himself, he knew nothing; his personal and royal egotism constituted his entire genius. All liberty was offensive to him, even liberty in religious belief; uniformity of faith and worship appeared to him as one of the prerogatives of monarchy. Policy strengthened these opinions in his mind. He did not feel himself sufficiently a king, when the liberal creed of one portion of his subjects protested insolently against the belief of the monarch. Independence as

Digitized by Google

to established tenets, was with him a conspiracy against heaven; as he considered liberty a faction against earthly authority.

The long civil and religious war of the League had terminated by the recantation of Henry IV. This prince, having conquered with the aid of the Reformers, was about to reign against them. His faith gave way to his ambition, and he bartered, with impious jests, his religion for a throne. We remember his words, which have since passed into a proverb with the ambitious, "Paris is well worth a mass." Nevertheless, to cement a peace between his old friends the Protestants and his new subjects the Catholics, this King, tolerant from policy, had published the Edict of Nantes, which promised perfect liberty and equality to the two different modes of worship. This Edict was irksome to the Catholics, for equality was not victory; it was equally distasteful to Louis XIV., for having become a Catholic by the defection of Henry IV. to the Protestant party, this party could only see enemies upon the throne in the successors of the apostate monarch. However, neither Cardinal Richelieu, who was such an exterminator of the aristocracy, nor Cardinal Mazarin, the pacificator of civil troubles, had dared to revoke the Edict of Nantes: it was the grand charter of liberty of faith—one half of the kingdom lived under its shadow.

During the regency of Anne of Austria, the Government confined itself to converting, by means of undue favour, the influential families of the court and pro-

Digitized by Google

vinces. They bought consciences one by one; and it must be said, to the shame of the really religious convictions of France at this period, that they were not sold at a very high price. The example of Henry IV. had made a change in religion a mere matter of traffic. None felt themselves guilty in abjuring for an estate or title that which the King had forsaken for a throne.

But no sooner had Louis XIV., surrounded by his mother, Anne of Austria, and by fervid Catholics and bishops imbued with Spanish traditions, assumed the reins of power into his own hands, than the plan of rendering the faith of the kingdom uniform, either by bribery, constraint, or even, if necessary, by extreme violence, became the soul of the Government: everything converged by degrees and incessant efforts to this great end.

It was not difficult for politicians to persuade the young monarch, that the last leaven of revolt existed in the heterodox worship, and that he would never be really king, until he held the right of governing his people in the name of a God, who, properly speaking, could only be represented by royalty. The bishops easily made him look upon this great service performed for the church as an expiation for the thoughtlessness and scandalous proceedings of his youth. He persuaded himself that God would pardon every irregularity in a prince who brought back an entire nation to his service.

Love and war suspended for a considerable time these ideas; but when Louis became satiated at once

Digitized by Google

with glory and pleasure, and when Madame de Maintenon, the Duke de Beauvilliers, the Duke de Montausier, Bossuet, the Archbishop of Rheims, the Chancellor Letellier, and all the religious portion of the court, began to direct his now unoccupied and scrupulous mind to the interests of religion, Louis XIV. returned to his plans with renewed ardour.

From bribery they proceeded to compulsion. Missionaries, escorted by dragoons, spread themselves, at the instigation of Bossuet and even of Fénelon, over the western, southern, and eastern provinces, and particularly in those districts, throughout which Protestantism, more firmly rooted amongst a more tenacious people, had as yet resisted all attempts at conversion by preaching. The repetition of these facts is terrible, but indispensable; to pass over in silence what is wrong, is to encourage, strengthen, and flatter evil.

Children from above seven years of age were authorized to abjure legally the religion of their fathers. The houses of those parents who refused to deliver up their sons and daughters were invaded and laid under contributions by the royal troops. The expropriation of their homes and the tearing asunder of families, compelled the people to fly from open persecution. The King, uneasy at this growing depopulation, pronounced the punishment of the galleys against those who sought liberty in flight: he also ordered the confiscation of all the lands and houses which were sold by those proprietors who were preparing to quit the kingdom.

Digitized by Google

He placed under one category the consciences of the nation, excluding from nearly every office, and soon from every trade, those who persisted in following the proscribed faith, in order that the people might be reduced to choose between life and abjuration.

Perpetual banishment was pronounced against those clergymen who maintained and propagated their creed by their words. This harsh treatment caused the people to murmur, and seditions to arise in the provinces thus cruelly treated, which were punished by torture.

The grandson of the state-councillor of Henry IV., who had drawn up the text of the Edict of Nantes, was broken on the wheel at Grenoble for having claimed the privilege of the royal act. Many other individuals were also similarly executed, or hanged at Toulouse. "France resembles a sick man, whose legs and arms are cut off to cure him," wrote Queen Christina of Sweden, who happened to visit the kingdom at this period. Very soon the proscription was organized *en masse:* all the cavalry in the kingdom, who on account of the peace were unemployed, were placed at the disposal of the preachers and bishops, to uphold their missions with the sabre.

"The King wishes," thus wrote the minister Louvois, son of Letellier, the friend of Bossuet, "that the utmost severity should be shown to all who refuse to embrace his religion, and this severity must be pushed to extremity against those who desire the foolish glory of being the last to be converted."

Digitized by Google

Bossuet approved of these persecutions. Religious and political faith in his eyes justified their necessity. His correspondence is full of evidence, while his actions prove that he was an accomplice: even his eloquence, as we shall see, overflowed with approbation of, and enthusiasm for these oppressions of the soul and *terrors* of heresy. At length, when the proscriptions had left scarcely any surviving voices to murmur, the King ventured upon the great *coup d'état* against liberty of conscience. The formal revocation of the Edict of Nantes was pronounced by a counter-edict emanating from the royal authority.

Bossuet's party and that of the Court, blending mutually in the same satisfaction, had only one common cry with which to applaud the triumph of violence. Persecution, which up to this time had been illegal and disguised, now became the open law of the state. The country was all at once deprived of nearly a quarter of her children. It became necessary to abandon either the name of Frenchman, or to abjure the faith dictated by conscience.

"You have doubtless seen," wrote Madame de Sévigné on the 31st of October, "the new decree by which the King revokes the Edict of Nantes. Nothing is to be compared to this exercise of royal authority; and no monarch has ever done, or will ever do, anything so truly memorable."

Thus, according to place and time, there will ever be found approbation and praise for persecutors as well as for the oppressed. Party spirit extinguishes the

Digitized by Google

instincts of justice and pity even in the hearts of women; history alone espouses, without any difference of opinion, the side of the victims.

The legalized persecutions which followed the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, recalled the most celebrated proscriptions that had occurred in the annals of the human race. It was even proposed to imprison in a body, and without exception, all who declared themselves opposed to the religion of the King. The clergymen of the reformed faith were allowed fifteen days, during which they were either to abjure their creed, or expatriate themselves from the kingdom.

Thousands of families who had been rooted out and expelled from their residences, fled by every frontier and every sea-port. Colonies of these proscribed people spread over Germany, England, Piedmont, the mountains of the Vaudois, and even to the extremities of Africa and America. The orders of the King, who condemned them to banishment, at the same time forbade flight: the prisons were not large enough to contain the people, and the galleys were filled to overflowing with those criminals who preferred martyrdom to apostasy.

Everything was considered a crime in those who were allowed to remain in France: they were forbidden to employ Catholic servants or workmen, lest the religion of the master should corrupt the household; they were not permitted to have Protestant servants, lest their houses should become asylums for those who secretly professed the same faith; they were compelled

Digitized by Google

to be present at the ceremonies, and to partake of the sacraments of a worship which in their hearts they repudiated. We have before our eyes the letters of Bossuet, in which these measures are gravely discussed, and which decide by what signs they might discover the sincerity and punish the hypocrisy of these compulsory attendances at the ceremonies of the Church. Those who, when dying, refused to fulfil the Catholic rites, were dragged upon a hurdle and thrown upon the dunghill, like some denounced and unclean animal.

Terror kindled fanaticism. The Cévennes, a rude and religious district in the south, broke out into open insurrection; this rebellion was stifled in blood. Reciprocal assassinations threw the provinces into consternation. A priest of frenzied zeal, the Abbé du Chaila, after having been himself mutilated when a missionary in India, returned to inflict torture upon his Protestant countrymen in the Cévennes. A martyr himself before long, he was immolated on the dead bodies of those he had sacrificed. Each was by turns, or at once, the executioner and the victim. Catholic priests and Protestant ministers were, according to the vicissitudes of the contest, followed, tracked, and shot down without mercy or distinction in the caverns of the rocks and mountains. Three of the King's armies, commanded by marshals of France, could hardly extinguish this La Vendée in its own blood: everybody died, took flight, or abjured their faith. The eye and hand of Government were only occupied under the sometimes paternal, but more frequently barbarous directions of

Digitized by Google

theologians, in perpetuating a domestic purification which tore children from fathers and mothers who were suspected or obstinate, in order to sever them from their faith, and shut them up in convents under the institutions of a different creed. Fénelon himself was only distinguished in this political apostleship by more gentle means of persuasion; but he approves, in two letters, of the employment of troops and salutary intimidation to enforce change of faith by fear.

As for Bossuet, he triumphed openly, and boldly assumed the responsibility of the proscription over the coffin of the Chancellor Letellier, the minister, contriver, author, and executor of these barbarities. In the funeral sermon which he preached on his friend, he dismissed him to the presence of his Creator with his proscriptions as a title to salvation and glory.

"Our fathers," said he in this panegyric, "did not see, as we see, an inveterate heresy fall suddenly upon the universe, astonished at witnessing in such a novel event the most assured proof of the noblest use of authority; and the personal merit of the prince more recognised and revered than even his power."

Then bursting into lyric poetry, he began a song of triumph upon France, which had been purged of millions of proscribed heretics by the hand of these purifiers of the faith.

"Do not let us, however," cries he, "pass lightly over this miracle of our days: let us hand down the recital to future ages! *Take your sacred pens, you who compose the annals of the Church. . . . Nimble instru-*

Digitized by Google

ments of a prompt writer and a diligent hand! Hasten to place Louis XIV. in the position of Constantine or Theodosius. Before the reign of these emperors, whose laws forbade assemblies of heretics, sects remained united and linked together for a long series of years. But since God has stirred up Christian princes to interdict these erroneous forms of worship to heretics, and that the clergy who watched over them have prevented their being exercised in private, these inveterate enthusiasts have died without posterity, because they could not freely propagate their mischievous dogmas. Thus fell heresy, with its venom."

And after having celebrated a more recent, and, according to him, a more marvellous persecution, he continues: "Let our acclamations resound to heaven, and let us proclaim to this new Constantine, this new Theodosius, this new Marcian, this new Charlemagne, what the six hundred fathers of the Church declared of old in the council of Chalcedon. You have established the faith; you have exterminated heresy: behold a work worthy of your reign! King of heaven, preserve the king of the earth! Such is the prayer of the Church, and the invocation of her bishops."

"When the pious chancellor affixed his seal to the revocation of the celebrated Edict of Nantes, he exclaimed, after witnessing this triumph of faith, this magnificent monument of the King's piety, that nothing now remained for him but to die! These were the last words that he uttered in his office as minister."

After such expressions, it is impossible to think that

Digitized by Google

Bossuet was not implicated in this foul blot upon the reign of Louis XIV. His theological implacability changed in his own mouth oppression of conscience into virtue. We lament this false conviction of right, which compels the historian to inscribe after the name of such an exalted genius and such a zealous partisan, the title of proscriber.

But truth renders this inevitable. When zeal becomes a passion, it readily merges into violence; and when it guides the hand of political power, the apostle becomes responsible for the executioner. Let us hasten to throw a veil over this portion of Bossuet's ecclesiastical ministry. It was not his soul, but his logic that was cruel. He did not seek to avenge himself, but his excessive pride blinded him until he believed that he was the avenger of God: a terrible lesson to every excess of zeal, to every extreme opinion, and to all future times.

The death of the Prince de Condé recalled the bishop to an eloquence more worthy of himself. It appeared as if his genius acquired added solemnity from his own near approach to the tomb: the decease of his first protector and most constant admirer, told him that all fame must perish.

These two pre-eminent glories of the age, the one in war, and the other in literature and religion, appeared as if they were mutually drawn towards each other. Bossuet felt the warning in his heart, and he reflected it in his voice. The peroration of this discourse reaches the apex of modern eloquence,—the ancients possessed

Digitized by Google

not such power of language. The similarity in advanced age, the contemporaneous career and equality of position between the orator and the hero who reposed in the sleep of death at his feet, carried his flow of words to the loftiest elevation : the scene was worthy of the discourse.

" Cast your eyes around, on every side," said Bossuet; " behold all that magnificence and piety could do to pay honour to a hero ! Titles, inscriptions—vain marks of what exist no longer—figures which seem to weep round a tomb, and fragile images of a grief which, like everything else, is obliterated by time ; columns which appear as if they wished to bear to heaven a mighty witness of our insignificance ;—and nothing is wanting in all these honours, except the object to whom they are paid.

" Weep, then, over these feeble remains of human life ! Weep over this sad immortality which we assign to our heroes ! But above all things, be impressed, O you warlike and undaunted spirits, who race with so much ardour in the career of glory ! Who was ever more worthy to command you, and where have you found a more honest leader ?

" Weep, then, for this great captain, and say amidst your sighs, ' This is he who led us in danger, under whom so many renowned chieftains have been found, who by his example have risen to the highest honours of the military profession. His shadow may still gain battles, and even in silence his name animates us, and at the same time warns us, that in order to find in

Digitized by Google

death some rest from our labours, and not to reach our eternal abode without some sure reliance or resource, we must serve the King in heaven as faithfully as our king on earth.'

"Serve, then, this immortal Sovereign who overflows with mercy, and who will estimate more highly a sigh or a glass of water offered in his name, than all other monarchs would deem of all your blood spilt in their cause; and begin to date your useful services from that day when you devote yourselves to a master of such unbounded beneficence.

"And you, will you not approach this monument? you, I say, whom he fondly classed in the rank of his friends? All of you, in whatever degree of confidential intercourse you have stood with him, surround this tomb together, mingle tears with your prayers, and while admiring in so great a prince a friendship so disinterested, and an intercourse so sweet, preserve the remembrance of a hero whose virtue equalled his courage. Thus may he always be to you a dear subject of conversation; thus may you profit by his perfections, and thus may his death that you deplore, be to you at the same time a consolation and an example.

"As for me, if I may be permitted after all others to render the last services at this tomb, O prince, worthy object of our praises and regrets, you will live eternally in my memory; your image will be traced there, not representing that commanding image which promised victory, for I wish to behold nothing in you that death can efface. But it will be stamped with immor-

Digitized by Google

tality. I shall there look upon you such as you were at that last day under the hand of God, when his glory had already begun to shine upon you. It is there that I see you more triumphant than at Fribourg and Rocroi; and transported by so great a victory, I shall say in returning thanks, in the words of the beloved disciple, *Et hæc est victoria quæ vincit mundum, fides nostra.* The true victory which conquers the whole world, and places it under our feet, is the victory of faith.

"Enjoy, prince, this sublime conquest; enjoy it eternally by the immortal virtue of this sacrifice. Accept the last efforts of a voice which was known to you, and whose last discourse will be dedicated to your memory. Instead of deploring the death of others henceforth, great prince, I shall learn from you to render my own holy. Happy if warned by these white hairs of the account that I must shortly give of my ministry, I shall reserve for the flock that I ought to nourish with the word of life, the remains of a voice which is broken, and an ardour that will soon be extinguished."

Bossuet retired from public life, looking upon death with the same calm majesty of demeanour which he had exhibited in withdrawing from the pulpit. He entered more and more into the solitude of his twilight, as a priest who buries himself in the shadow of the cloisters. His appearance at court became much more rare, his visits to Meaux and his country retreat longer and more frequent;—he had finished his task,—he had by the word, and, unfortunately for himself, by

Digitized by Google

the sword, achieved the unity of faith, which, with the despotic unity of the throne subservient only to the Church, had constituted the Utopian dream of his life.

As a pontiff, he had no longer anything to desire; as a man, he resigned himself to the disappointment of not having attained the double end of his ecclesiastical being—the archbishopric of Paris and the dignity of Cardinal: the King had found him too plebeian, the Pope too much of a Frenchman, to aggrandise still more in his person the great tribune of the Gallican church.

It cannot be doubted that he often felt a secret bitterness of heart at this ingratitude of the King and resentment on the part of Rome. His was one of those minds which cannot separate moral grandeur from grandeur of situation: an inferior bishopric appeared to him to contrast unjustly with the eminence of his services and the superiority of his genius.

We see, from time to time, a certain air of humility and indistinct reproach run through his letters. The archbishopric of Paris and the cardinal's robe were wanting in his eyes to complete the lustre of his name.

But these two regrets, softened by so much respect from the Court and the Church, never palpably escaped his lips. If he murmured to himself respecting services ill requited, the words of Strafford —"*Nolite fidem principibus et filiis hominis, quia non est salus in illis,*" (Put not your trust in princes or in any child of man, for there is no help in them,)—

Digitized by Google

at least he never uttered these sentiments in the hearing of others: faith and piety closed silently and holily these wounds of his heart.

He placed his glory in his faith, and his faith in his glory. He did not sadden his old age or his friends by dwelling upon the ingratitude of man and his deceived hopes, which form a leading consolation of little minds, while they excite the contempt of great ones. He grew old with God, as he had lived in constant intercourse with Him.

These vexations detached him from the world, which had, perhaps, exercised too great a hold upon his thoughts. Study, and above all, sacred poetry, became more and more the occupation and charm of his leisure. Poetry is the eloquence of ease and contemplation.

He composed many verses, which he allowed his friends to read, but which he destroyed as soon almost as they were written, either because he looked upon them as inferior to his prose, or that he considered them as a play of words too light for his sacred character. But private prayer, the perusal of his breviary, his presence at the cathedral ceremonies, polemical discussions upon theological questions of the day, the correction of his literary works and his already published harangues, and the preparation of some familiar sermons for his humble auditory at Meaux,—completely occupied the residue of his life.

His soul reposed itself in a continual but regular activity of imagination. He slept little, like those old

Digitized by Google

men whose vigils appear as if they wished to gain a few hours more of thought from the eternal sleep which rapidly approaches. A lamp burnt continually in his chamber; it could be seen from a distance shining through the windows of his apartment, between the trees of the garden, at the side of the hill commanded by his palace, and by the massive shadows of his cathedral. This lamp was a symbol of his reflections to the inhabitants of Meaux. The poor workmen of the suburb, and the gardeners, whose cottages were spread over the opposite eminence, recognised this morning light, and called it, *the star of my lord the Bishop.*

He rose several times during the night to write down the thoughts which visited his wakeful hours.

"Enveloped," says his secretary, "in the skin of a bear, with the hair turned inside, his feet often uncovered, his head whitened by the snows of age, and his tall and meagre figure,—he resembled the prophets whose verses he was continually employed in commenting on and repeating.

"He chanted before daybreak, in a low voice, those old liturgies which the Church has called 'Matins,' in allusion to the divisions of the night during which its ministers are compelled to recite them. He laboured afterwards for two or three hours at his historical compositions, at the preparation of his sermons, and in writing poetry. The swiftness of his hand in writing, which was hardly perceptible while crossing the paper with a continual and regular movement, recalled 'those nimble pens, the rapid instruments of the mind,' which

Digitized by Google

he had invoked in the funeral sermon of the chancellor. Like all writers who suffer from a long exercise of thought, he threw down the implement as soon as it no longer moved quickly between his fingers: he knew that genius consisted in a youthfulness and freshness of ideas, and that inspiration stops when lassitude begins. He returned to his couch at the break of dawn, and reposed his mind in a second and short sleep. The rest of the day was given to the world, to business, to his cathedral, to a frugal table, to leisure, to conversation, to reading, and to familiar intercourse with his friends."

His opulence permitted him to neglect entirely all domestic affairs. He himself confessed his inaptitude for the economical management of a large establishment. The Church and the King had taken these cares upon themselves. He suffered the overplus of his savings to flow in moderate indulgence, in relieving the poor, and in assisting his friends and relations. He held quite a court of intimate associates, composed of the leading men of the age.

Besides Fénelon, whose regard he had lost,—not without waiting seven years in the hope of its return, —he reckoned amongst his acknowledged friends, the great Condé, the minister; M. de Malézieu; M. de Valincourt, whose reputation, in general esteem, stood above that of all their contemporaries; M. D'Ormesson, an eminent administrator; D'Herbelot, the Orientalist, who taught him, at seventy-two years of age, the Hebrew language; Pellisson, the immediate predecessor of Boileau; La Bruyère, the forerunner of Molière;

Digitized by Google

Boileau himself, who dedicated to him his "Epistle upon the Love of God;" Racine, who submitted "Athalie" for his approbation; Santeuil, who allowed him to correct his hymns, and who denominated him—"*Per quem religio manet inconcussa, sacerdos!*" (A priest through whose firm hand the immutable faith resists all the convulsions of the times!)

The list included others of less celebrity: the Abbé de Fleury, who wrote history under his inspection and superintendence with the modesty of a disciple;—the Abbé Ledieu, who was his select table-companion, secretary, and chosen confidant at every period of life; Bourdaloue and the young Massillon, who came to Germigny and Meaux to repeat their sermons before the great master of elocution.

His conversation was calm, gentle, indulgent to the influence of natural feeling, and equally removed from prudery and licence: he loved the ease, but never the indecency, of familiar conversation. "Be cheerful, but do not descend to facetiousness," said he, in a letter to one of his intimate friends; "light jests, when they are personal, approach too near to raillery, and raillery is often either insipid or offensive."

He did not approve of laughter, which almost invariably outrages either dignity or charity;—a mind full of solemn thought could not give utterance to such a hollow sound. Jesus Christ, his master, had never laughed during his life: but Bossuet loved a smile, which indicates only the relaxation of the higher faculties and the kind participation of the heart.

Digitized by Google

For a long time, inward suffering, produced by his unremitting sedentary occupations, induced his friends to fear that he was threatened with the stone.

He did not attempt to disguise his increasing weakness to himself: he had a presentiment that his end was approaching, and took leave of his clergy in 1702, in a discourse addressed to the ecclesiastical synod of the diocese; a sermon in which he involuntarily recalled his pathetic peroration at the funeral oration of the Prince de Condé.

"These white hairs, my dear brethren," said he to them, "warn me that soon I must render an account to God of my ministry, and that to-day will perhaps be the last time that I shall be permitted to address you."

He employed his closing days in translating the Psalms into French verse, the only poetry which he considered worthy of his pen, and which, as he said, "he hoped to hear sung in heaven, and with the prospect of which consummation he consoled himself beforehand on earth." Nevertheless, he still doubted whether his malady was incurable; and the positive assurance of this, that he received from the mouth of Fagon, the great physician of the day, accelerated the stroke of death even more than the disease itself.

The dread of an operation, which it became necessary for him to submit to, prevailed over the firmness of the philosopher and the virtue of the Christian: a fever of terror seized him, his voice became inaudible, his pen fell from his hand—he could not himself write the note which summoned his confessor to prepare his soul for

Digitized by Google

the doubtful result of this dangerous operation: he faltered at the idea of the torture to which art was about to submit him under the vague chance of recovery. His robust health and continual good fortune had ill prepared him for this punishment. He compassionated his own body, — he who had felt too little pity for the tears and tortures endured by so many proscribed Protestants: he wept not at the thought of death, but he shed tears at the anticipation of physical pain.

His nephew, the Abbé Bossuet, profited by this weakness to induce him to solicit the King to bestow upon him the reversion of the bishopric of Meaux, an inheritance which would thus be consigned to an unworthy heir.

Madame de Maintenon and the Cardinal de Noailles, who had no wish to comply with this blameable nepotism in Bossuet, or to sadden his last days by a denial, advised the King to defer the favour, and neither to grant or refuse it to this illustrious supplicant.

Bossuet, during an interval of his malady, dragged himself to the court to solicit the King personally on his nephew's behalf. Louis XIV. received him as his spiritual father, but told him that the hour had not come for the disposal of his benefices. Fatigue and fever detained him several days at Versailles; and he there received the sacraments of the Church, and dictated his will.

The enormous amount of debt which he had contracted by his negligence of domestic affairs and his prodigality, threw him into consternation. A mortal,

Digitized by Google

but slow languor, succeeded to this increase of his disease; advantage was taken of this to convey him back to Paris. His sleep during the night was broken by deep sighs and delirious wanderings; he was heard to lament and resign himself in a loud voice. During the day he constantly directed the Gospels to be read to him, as the promises of which he had need to fortify himself against the dread of death. "I frequently read, at his request, the same Gospel five or six times over," says the friend who watched beside his couch.

A train, perpetually renewed, of courtiers, friends, and ecclesiastics, besieged his door. They felt that the resplendent glory of the age was about to be extinguished, and were desirous of gathering the last beams. The closing hours of great men present a spectacle which the world loves to witness and remember. Bossuet had regained his serenity and hope of prolonged existence. "I can perceive plainly," said he, "that God has determined to preserve me."

The ardour of sacred controversy again lit up within him. He looked over his treatises against the Jansenists, and dictated corrections in his "*Sacred Policy.*" His genius had not faded: he still wrote with the nerve of his most vigorous days. "Faith," said he, "is a torch, but a torch shining in an obscure place, the darkness of which it cannot wholly dissipate. If all was obscure, we should grope in profound night, in danger at each step, and without the power of ever arriving at conviction. But at the same time, if all was too clear, we should fancy ourselves already in the

Digitized by Google

country and light of truth. Everything establishes our want of teaching and guidance, inwardly by the Divine Spirit, outwardly by the authority of the Church. He often repeated this passage in the Gospel, which he doubtless intended as an epitaph for himself—'This child is set for the fall and rising of many.'"*

The fire of a mortal fever rapidly consumed him. "Cease to deceive me," said he to his friends; "may the will of God with regard to me be done; I feel my insignificance. Let us pray together; I feel that the machine is worn out. Let us pray but little at a time, on account of the great pain I suffer."

The week had arrived during which the Church commemorates by prayer, lamentation, and rejoicing, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. He joined in heart with the sacred ceremonies. His friends spoke to him of his mission so magnificently accomplished, of his writings, his virtues, his sanctity, and his glory; at this last word glory, which perhaps had been his besetting weakness, he felt angry with himself. "Cease such discourse," cried he; "speak of pardon alone, the only word that man ought to use!"

Cold shiverings ascended from his limbs to his heart, but he was still sensible, and continued to pray. He was heard to murmur in Latin, "*Vim patior, sed scio cui credidi!*" (I suffer the violence of pain and death, but I know in whom I have believed!)

* St. Luke ii. 34.

Digitized by Google

His faith outlived his mortal existence. After these words he became drowsy, and slept tranquilly until morning: at break of day the attendants heard a breath more deeply drawn than usual; it proved to be the last. Bossuet was no more; judgment was about to be pronounced on him from above; his memory was all that remained to us below.

That memory is august, but not without reproach. There were two distinct elements in the composition of Bossuet, the man and his talent. The latter was incomparable, but the mortal was inferior to his endowments: he had a correct but violent will, a great but tyrannic genius; his absolute, imperious character was not only that of an exalted apostle, but also of an inexorable judge. There are tears in history which bear eternal witness against him; he brought war into the world, and not peace; a never-ending contest is linked with his memory, and will disturb it even in the tomb. He did some good to religion, none to humanity; but he reflected immeasurable glory on his country: the reputation of his talent followed and increased amongst the admirers of human intellect: it belongs not to his works, but to the man himself.

His natural philosophy was limited by the dogmatic spirit with which he systematically contemplated the universe. He was more of a theologian than a philosopher. The religious quarrels in which he consumed his life, have grown old, and distance makes them gradually fade from the eyes of posterity. His "Universal History" is only a play of genius; his contro-

Digitized by Google

versies, nothing but an outburst of language, of which, after the lapse of two centuries, we can no longer understand the meaning. Quietism and Jansenism, those subtleties of the maxims of the Gallican church, are reduced to cold ashes, which no words of the prophet can ever again rekindle.

The letters to his nuns, the conferences with the synods of Meaux, the sermons preached upon retirements to the cloister, the funeral orations of several queens, princesses, or of courtly friends,—more or less worthy of this overpowering voice,—are no longer, from their subject, anything beyond high-sounding witnesses of the insignificance of those names which have died with their panegyrist. All is momentary and accidental in the occupations of this long life, and nothing except the eloquence is born of nature, and calculated to survive as an enduring monument to future ages.

But Bossuet is, in fact, his own monument. His nature was so exalted that it has survived, and will eternally survive, his works: it was the reflected grandeur of God, not his own. His was the most flowing, the most imaginative, the loftiest, and the most persuasive eloquence with which Providence has ever gifted the lips of man.

The glory of Bossuet is so incorporated with that of his country, that to diminish it would be to deduct something from the majesty of French genius.

His name resembles the summit of the Alps or the Himalaya, enveloped with snows or storms, uninhabit-

Digitized by Google

able by man, but which constitute the renown and pride of the countries overshadowed by these lofty ridges, and which serve to demonstrate how nearly earth can approach to the elevation of heaven.

THE END.

Digitized by Google

LONDON:
PRINTED BY RICHARD CLAY,
BREAD STREET HILL.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google